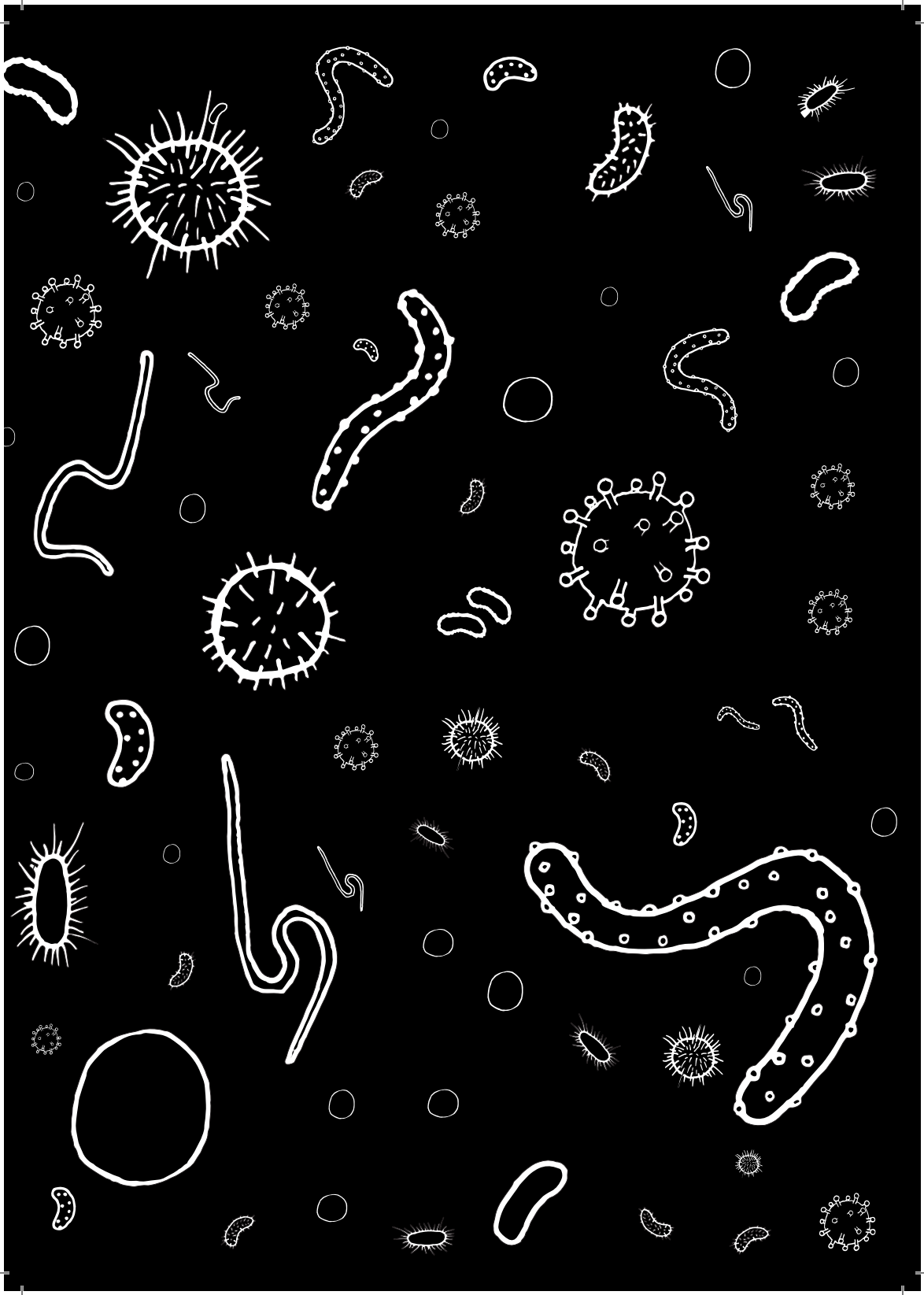
LUMPEN

A journal for poor and working class writing

Issue 001
Oct 2019



Lumpen

A Journal for Poor and Working Class Writing
Issue 1

First published October 2019.

Edited by D. Hunter, Dorothy Spencer, & Hannah Pearce.
Designed by Hannah Pearce.

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We printed this issue using an online print service because printing co-ops aren't affordable to us. All workers still got paid. But sadly, there was at least one boss involved in the process of publishing this journal.

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LUM
PEN.

Editorial

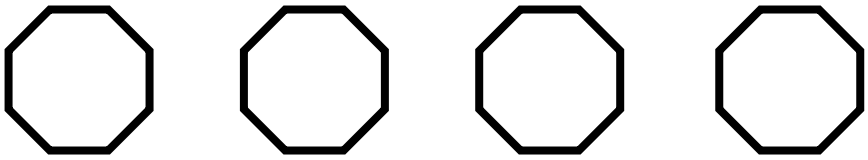
Back in February 2019, when I released a call out for submissions from poor and working-class writers, the intention was to produce a one off book. Over the next few months I travelled around the country promoting my book Chav Solidarity. The intense response to the tour, and to Chav Solidarity suggested that a singular collection would be a limited conversation. If it had been a one off, then I'd still be delighted to be facilitating the distribution of the writing that you're about to explore in this issue. But in turning it into a journal - something we will put out every 3 months until our lives tell us not to - we want to have a space where the true breadth of poor and working-class writers in Britain gets a chance to shine. To showcase the diversity of opinion among poor and working-class people, the nuances in our experiences and ideas and encourage dialogue and conversation. 'Cause too often we end up having to battle for spaces created by and for the economically comfortable and secure, the socially and culturally powerful. This issue is a starting point, something to prompt discussion. Over time we want to

work with contributors to encourage them to develop their ideas, and promote their self-confidence as writers. And we want to get those who would never call themselves writers, those who have barely written a paragraph to get their ideas down on paper, to have their thinking shared and explored.

Over the last few months I've had people tell me that there is no need for projects like this. This comes from folks who have always been filled to the brim with social and cultural power, and have never missed a meal, or ever really been concerned about how their basic needs might be met. But the emergence and critical acclaim of writers such as Darren McGarvey, Cash Carraway, Akala and Kerry Hudson, and anthologies like "Common People" suggests that the publishing industry is genuinely beginning to take economically marginalised voices seriously. As much as I enjoy the writing of those four writers, and am inspired by each of them, their emergence does not remedy the problem. Those books are out there because people want to hear those voices. As always, the publishers are putting them out because they know they can sell them. McGarvey and Akala had already created spaces for themselves as rappers, educators and public intellectuals due to their insight, craft and skills as orators. Hudson had done the same with her debut novel, and Carraway by the stunning way she has articulated her experiences on the margins (first through her play and then her book.) These writers are both exceptions and 'exceptional' in multiple ways. But we shouldn't just hear from exceptional poor and working-class people. We wanna hear from those who don't have a drive and need to push through into mainstream, or at least into the little corner of the mainstream that they keep the perspective of the poor. More than that, I want us to have our own spaces; our own publications where we have as much control in all aspects of cultural production as we can. I don't give a shit whether some Oxbridge, Guardian reading, fan of the Wire thinks a particular poor and working-class writer is worthy. Fuck those gatekeepers.

We'll manage our own spaces, thanks.

Lumpen is one of our spaces, and the "our" in this is those of us who have spent prolonged periods in economic precarity and poverty. Those who have been socially deprived, institutionally excluded, and culturally dismissed. So, that's what Lumpen strives to be. Since I put that call for submissions out in February I've been joined on the editorial team by HP and DS, others have shown an interest in getting involved, and we've had a whole host of people volunteer their time as proof readers, for which the three of us are hugely grateful. We'll always be up for supporting others like us who want to create more spaces for poor and working-class folks to spread their ideas… Because fucking hell do we need them.



In all honesty the journal in your hands probably only exists because I am a football hipster. I'd like to pretend I'm not, after all, admitting that is akin to confessing to being a right knob head. Given that I'm a product of council estates, state interventions and institutions, I have lived the life that meant I wrote Chav Solidarity, it'd be easier for me to act like I'm just a right proper football fan. But I've got a subscription to The Athletic, my favourite YouTube channel is Tifo Football, and I think Julian Naggelsmann is the bee's knees. More importantly I love The Blizzard. In the football world loving The Blizzard is akin to saying that J Dilla is the most important hip hop artist of all time. Or only listening to the Mountain Goats albums that were recorded on a boom box. It's basically being into the nichest thing of a pretty niche thing.

It's basically a way to highlight your cleverness to yourself and others. Maybe it's like being in the RCG...

I've had a subscription to The Blizzard since it began, it was the brainchild of the brainiest of football historian's and Sunderland fan Jonathan Wilson (apart from maybe David Goldblatt). He's a bit of a big noise in football writing and he wanted to create a football publication where long form football writing that didn't really fit in anywhere else could come to rest. The Blizzard comes through my door four times a year, and it's great. Most of you would be bored silly by it. But we all have hobbies, and esoteric football stories is mine. It pleases me aesthetically as well. I've got all the issues in a nice row on a bookshelf in my office.

This is relevant because originally Lumpen was going to be a one off book. But over the months where folks submitted essays, I kept glancing up at those pretty copies of The Blizzard. I began to think fuck the book, this shouldn't be a book. It should instead be quarterly journal, that could sit on someone else's book shelf. The difference is that this is not a fucking hobby. To me, the politics of poor and working-class people, their ideas, their lives, their blood are the most important thing. And one of the reasons Lumpen (or something like it) needs to exist is because those politics, ideas and lives have been shunted over time out of the political discourse. Including (and most offensively) left-wing political discourse. So there's a lot of work left to be done autonomously. Room has to be left for us to teach, to enter into dialogue with one another in a space where we can take time, where we can share reflections and hear from others with similar stories to tell and ideas to put forth.

Why call it Lumpen: A journal for poor and working-class writing? Why does poor need to be in there? How are you defining working-class? Why Lumpen? A dry, barely used term to describe a bunch of people Marxists get snooty about? Well

we chose Lumpen 'cause we liked it, liked how it sounded. But more importantly because it's the Marxist term that describes the communities we come from. Those who are apparently wrapped up in a culture of dependency. Who are uninterested about political advancement, professional training, or personal self-improvement. Lumpenproletariat are the part of the working class that much of the left turn their noses up at. It is in many ways the same group of people who were called Chav's. This also speaks to why we say "poor and working-class" – we're not too interested in laborious conversations about what constitutes working-class. We'll just have to accept that there's a bunch of different definitions and move swiftly along. What matters is that the working class is socially fragmented, stratified and atomised. Many of those who dominated left leaning political discourse are from the working class – they're in their trade unions, they're in their local activist groups, they're battling for better pay and conditions, they're fighting the good fight yada, yada, yada. But really, due to the social fragmentation of our class they're lives are radically different to those that have lived lives of poverty. Those of us who have been described as 'Lumpen' or 'chavs'. Perhaps occasionally, perhaps regularly, in the newspaper or on the playground, wherever. That's why it's poor and working-class. We're making space for those who have been situated at the economic bottom of the working class. Whether that be the minimum wage worker, the street corner dealer, the agency worker, the sex worker, the benefit cheat, the asylum seeker, the football hooligan, the three generations unemployed, those of us who could have been invited on Jeremy "he's a piece of shit" Kyle… and of course those of us who worm our way round the neoliberal landscape that is the middle class, feeling alone, alienated, and pissed off.

Plenty of the writers in this first issue are no longer in those economic margins. A couple of us even have pretty reasonable buffers stopping them from getting pushed down into that

situation again. But their experiences of poverty have demanded lessons that maintain their relevance, and can inform people going through the same.

In the original call out for submissions we said:

"The essay can be on anything, but of particular interest. 1) Experiences in radical social movements when coming from poor and working-class backgrounds. 2) What is the state of the world, what's your analysis of it? Are there any problems with how the left in all its forms have acted over the last 50 years? What strategies can be effective? `3) Anything you like about your experiences, politics and class. Most submissions will be accepted, unless they start shitting on more marginalised people."

To a large extent this promise was kept. Many of the writers who submitted their work, have a piece in here. Those that don't might have one in the future. And sadly, others were rejected for shitting on more marginalised people. In the future we'll probably be more selective, try and keep it a little more focused. Dunno, maybe we won't.

D. Hunter


BLIZZARD ISSUE SEVENTEEN
BLIZZARD ISSUE SIXTEEN
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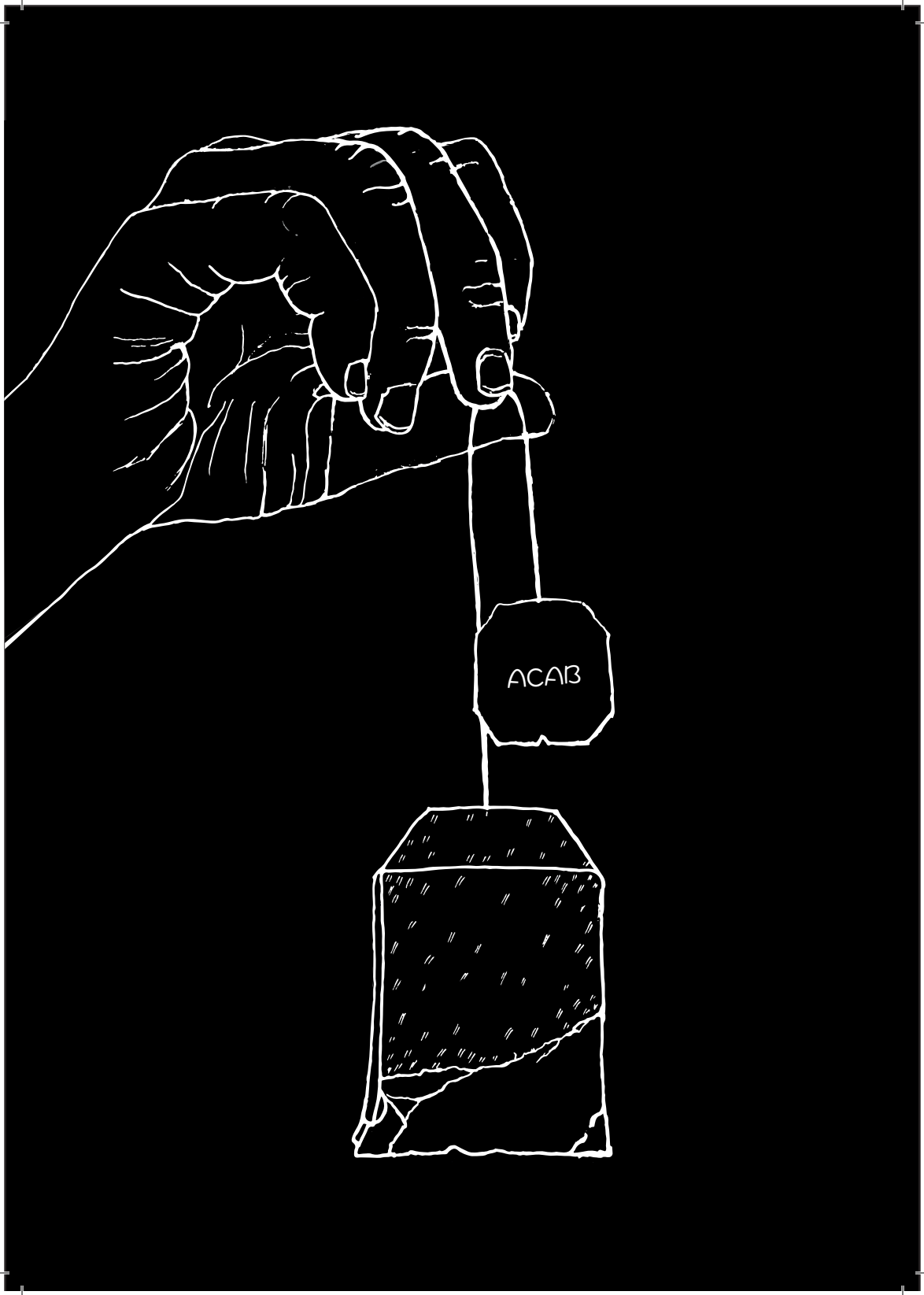

ACAB

Ten Commandments

Midnight Shelley

1. Thou shalt not do dealings with pigs.

2. Thou shalt not grass thy neighbour up to the dole or the immigration office.

3. Sugar, teabags, instant coffee, milk and rolling papers are communal items to be freely given upon request.

4. Thou shalt not steal from thine own.

5. If thou receivest more food/medication/ resources than thou needs, take it. There shall always be another round the corner in need of it.

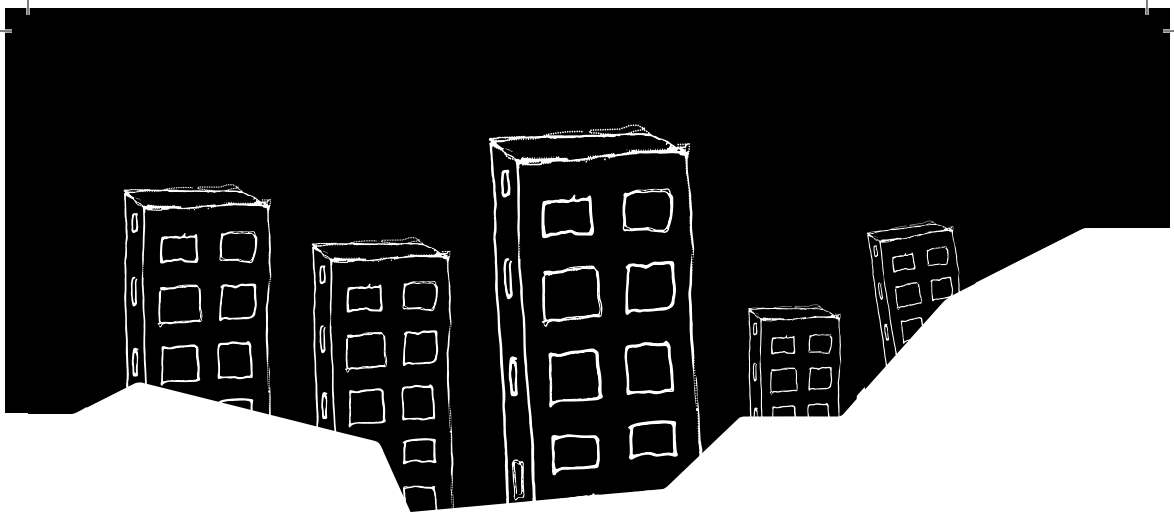
6. Thou shalt always offer items on tick, and give freely to others what thou no longer hast use of.

7. Thou shalt unionise, and never cross a picket line.

8. Thou shalt remember and revere the weekend as the sacred days fought for by thy forefathers and thy foremothers, and protect it with all thy might.

9. Thou shalt always punch up, never down.

10. Thou shalt always punch.



The Anarchy of Belonging

Alice Wolf

Imposter syndrome.

It's even got a name.

Learning about it was a bit of a revelation as it describes a way I have felt my entire life. A phenomenon where no matter how great our achievements are, or where in the world we find ourselves, we never fully believe we are quite deserving of it. The afflicted believe that we have cheated our way to success somehow, or that someone made a mistake on our appointment which will be discovered at any moment. Imposter syndrome transcends gender, race, and class but for those of us from marginalised and poor backgrounds we almost inherit it from birth.

For me, it always seems to find a way in. I grew up poor, in what is considered to be an affluent area. A place so picturesque that it provides the magical setting for quaint children's books, where everyone has been on their holidays at least once and where the rich buy up houses they only stay in for a few weeks of the year, keeping poorer local people out of the property market. As a

little kid, I never knew I was poor, until another child – one from a much wealthier family – pointed it out to me. She had been informed of this by her mother, and prior to her deciding to bring this up, both me and her daughter were happily unaware. Sure, I knew that some of my friends lived in much bigger houses than me and had been to places I hadn't, but it wouldn't be until later that I felt I had less than anyone else or truly understood class divides. When I tell people where I grew up they gush "Oh it's beautiful there, you are so lucky. I'd love to live there but I don't think I could afford it".

Yeah, neither could we most of the time.

People make assumptions about you when they find out where you are from. When I moved back to the North East of England in my late teens, there was a rumour started by a pissy libertarian I'd fallen out with, who told people that I had grown up rich, on titled land with gamekeepers and a trust fund. I sat crying with laughter, asking them to explain why I was then going back home to a crumbling tower block that night, in a flat with no electricity or gas on the meter, and a decomposed pigeon oozing through the air vents.

"Well someone said your Dad owns an estate in the Lake District".

"No, he lives on an estate. A fucking council estate. They have them there, you know? They need a supply of proles to serve the tourists their afternoon teas".

I was raised by my Dad there. He did everything he could to keep a roof over our head despite being chronically ill. My mam is from the North East and they met in Cumbria as young hotel workers. After they split when I was little, I moved with her. But I never settled and went back home a year later. I returned to live with her in my late teens, to a town that has been the poster child

for the effects of austerity. I didn't really fit in there, either. My accent wasn't right, with anyone who sounds like they are south of Darlington being deemed posh, a southerner, or both.

I got involved with left wing politics shortly after I started college, a couple of years after I moved. My interest in animal rights and environmentalism had been sparked at a much younger age, where I began making doe eyes at anarchism across the room before falling irrevocably in love with her. But living in a rural area where there wasn't a lot of access to information about these things, I'd never really been part of any organised political group. Instead swapping punk music and scarce copies of Schnews with the few like-minded souls amoung other people my age. Higher education isn't something people in my family usually do, and academia doesn't come easily to me. But for me it was an escape from a house full of ghosts, bad memories, domestic violence and alcohol fuelled aggression. I left my mam's house quickly, after one incident of having to square up to her boyfriend went too far. I knew if I didn't go soon I would end up in hospital or prison. While most of my fellow students were embracing living away from home for the first time, I left to seek refuge in a squat founded by our group and inhabited by a mixture of punks, students, homeless people, and politicos, and it instantly felt like home.

Honestly, it was one of the most nurturing environments I have ever been in. For the first time I felt part of a community who gave me a vision of the kind of world I want to live in and it was probably the least lonely I felt in my life. But the imposter syndrome crept back in when discussions started with some other groups. Their language was so academic, full of books and writers I had never even heard of. At one point someone started a counter argument with "yes, but in the very third paragraph of the communist manifesto" and I genuinely thought they were doing an impression of Rick from The Young Ones.

The communist manifesto. Never for the life of me will I ever understand why this piece of literature is often pressed into the hands of young people when they first show an interest in radical politics, particularly those who have had no exposure to that kind of writing. For me, a teenage girl, it might as well have been written in Elvish. No one I knew talked like that. No one I knew had ever been interested in anything like that. I had grown up to love books and reading, seeing it as an escape from the limitations of my real world, but I had no connection to it whatsoever and to this day I have never been able to read more than half a chapter without falling asleep.

Marxist narcolepsy. It's a real thing.

The discussions and the books they referenced taught me nothing other than to think of myself as thick. And I wasn't. I've always preferred writing than speaking, and issues with my memory relating to epilepsy mean I've always found it difficult to retain and recall information. It was through reading punk zines written by co-conspirators and later Emma Goldman's work, who wrote about real people, emotions and experiences that I really started to feel part of a movement in a way that allowed me to participate in discussions, rather than just smile and nod my head and pretend I had a clue about what was going on. That feeling of fraudulence stayed with me, even today, and I still struggle to keep it in check. I cringe if someone refers to me as a writer. It's pretty much all I've ever consistently wanted to be, so it should make me happy to be called as such, but honestly it just makes me feel awkward and hyper.

The sort of exclusion I felt in leftist discussions was never usually deliberate on the part of the people doing it. People are generally kind, and if I asked someone to explain something to me, they did. But there has been another, more overt kind of snobbery at times. My idealistic teenage self always put those on the left as

the good, kind, and inclusive ones, and those on the right as the intolerant, authoritarian baddies. But I quickly discovered pockets of left wing people claiming to be for the working classes and the most disenfranchised, then taking the piss out of them for uninformed political opinions, their appearance, their spelling, or because they don't like what they are saying and it has always left a sour taste in my mouth. A while ago I was part of a counter protest to a far right demonstration when someone – someone who was supposed to be on our side – shouted "you're all on benefits" sneeringly at the opposing crowd. It left me with an uncomfortable realisation. That I had more in common with some of the very people I was in conflict with than the people I was stood beside. There I was embroiled in a slanging match with another woman behind the divide, both of us being threatened with arrest by police. Yet it could be just as likely that next week, completely unbeknownst to either of us, I could be sat having a pint with her at the pub when seeing my family. They look the same, express some of the same views, experience the same problems and say some of the same awful things about immigrants even though we are not all white or British, my Grandad being a Muslim sailor who came to England from Somalia in the 1940's.

Racism isn't just about the colour of our skin, it's about poverty and class, and the 'Other' we are told is responsible for us having nothing. Your average fascist is always portrayed as a Union Jack waving football ultra carrying a bottle of cider as they stagger off the council estate to yell at Muslims. But let's have a look at some of the famous faces of right wing politics: Oswald Mosley was Sir Oswald Mosley of Ancoats, 6th Baronet (whatever the fuck that is) and had royal connections. Jacob Rees-Mogg who looks like he was summoned using an ancient curse on the set of Downton Abbey, says he doesn't think women should have access to abortion, even after rape, to very little uproar. Because he says these things with the quiet sociopathy of Nurse Ratched from One Flew Over The Cuckoos Nest, and everyone coos about how

reasonable and sensible he is. Nigel Farage is another wealthy, privately educated great pretender who loves nothing more than trying to convince us what a man of the people he is by posing with a pint, a flat cap, and a tab in the local pub, as if he'd bellowed "Siri, what do proles look like" at his phone and it showed him an Andy Capp comic. Tommy Robinson is slightly different. While not coming from such a privileged background, he has made himself rich through the persona he has sculpted, so when you repeatedly call him a chav, thinking you are insulting him by doing so, you are only alienating the people he is trying to mimic. Like the others though, he strolls into working-class communities that he knows are struggling, and manipulates people with very real problems for his own gain. Then when they stop being useful, he'll denounce them all and run to the next platform he thinks he will benefit from. He's done this with the BNP, the EDL and most recently, the Sugababes of politics, UKIP. He has never shown his fans a fraction of the loyalty they have shown him, nor appears to show any interest in the issues that might be affecting them unless he can make it about immigration, Islam, or shamelessly ask them for money he knows they don't have by claiming to be one of them.

You might piss yourself laughing for eight years straight because some kid once stuttered "muslamic rayguns" on camera once, but you do that at great risk. You make fun of their clothes or the way they speak at your own risk and then have the nerve to demand that they and others like them listen to what you have to say.

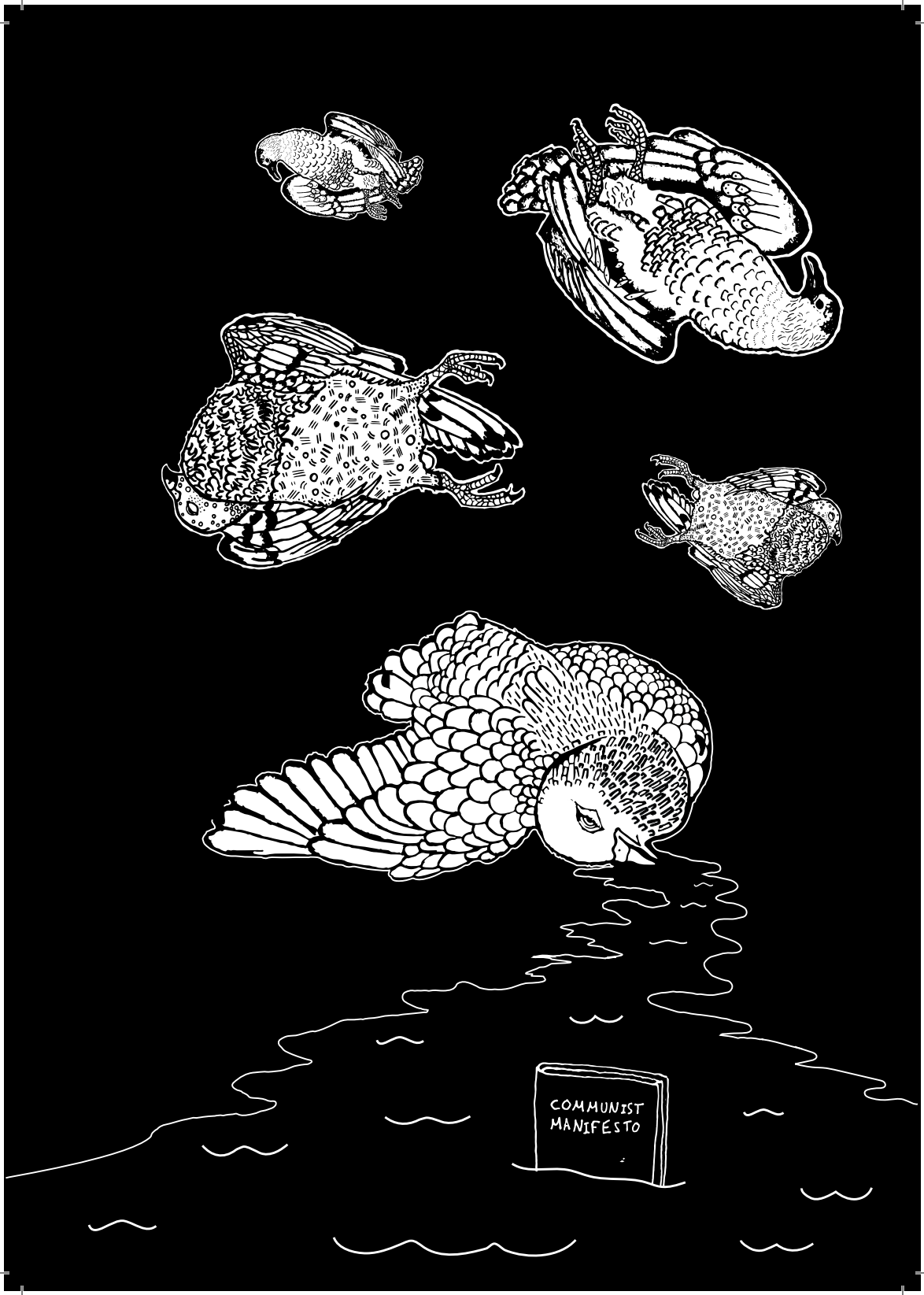
People don't usually fall for far right rhetoric because they are full of hate. They do so because they are exhausted and under resourced and disempowered. This is replicated throughout history. Most of Mosley's blackshirts were not privileged like he was. They were largely young and unemployed, working as shop girls and apprentices. Many young women joined his party on the

promise of gender equality, including some known Suffragettes. Because these movements, despite having incredibly dictatorial and conservative structures, always present themselves as radical and anti-authoritarian.

Fascism, and the racist ideas required to implement it, has always come from those with power. Fascists rely on either the force or complacency of those with less, which they get by promising them that their lives will be better, only to discard them quickly should they become too much trouble or expected to fulfil their pledges.

The left should, by default, be the antidote to that. After all, every civil liberty we have has been fought for by the working class. Nothing has been given to us out of the kindness of our rulers conscience. But we are often too easily talked into the backseat of the very movements we have created, while those who seek to sanitise and legitimise them take the reigns, only to steer us into gentrified rebellion.

We can change our lives and worlds for the better when we change our focus – take a magic eye, stare at the whole picture – and get a different view of who or what the obstacles are to our liberation. When we truly believe that our place is not on the fringes of survival and we belong in this world just as we are, not a tamer Pygmalion version that some former head of the students union wants to mould us into. When we remember that no one knows what we need better than us. When we start to meet the needs of our most isolated, instead of begging for help from governments who will watch us fight over the same kitchen scraps. We are the beating heart of rebellion and resistance when we keep our communities and our batting arms strong. Once we do that, we can glide like dragons who don't have to breathe in the sharp, cold night air, if we dare to be free.


COMMUNIST
MANIFESTO


HOME
FRONT

H P

My Nan and brother are standing in the middle of the living room. Feet planted to the ground, legs wide apart, knees bent, clenched fists, and wide toothy smiles nestled in plump red cheeks. They're play fighting. My brother is about eight years old and he's over stimulated, my nan boisterously swats at his tummy, laughing like a child. I remember watching them from the sofa. Restlessly, I raised my legs and let them fall freely so my heels bounced off the base of the sofa. I repeated, ruminating over why I didn't include myself in play, why I always observed from the sidelines, why I felt uncomfortable letting go like they did.

My nan looked on lovingly, engaged and present towards my brother, when I caught her eye the corners of her lips quivered.

My nan's in her late eighties now. I haven't seen her for two years.

My nan had been reticent about most things and I can't remember a single cheerful story from my Mum's growing up years, they were always chaotic, violent and unhinged. She, like everyone else had developed this way of speaking: small-townish, Black-Country, an unceremonial flippancy, the same dulled melodic tone used for ill-health, anguish and the weather.

She used to beat her dog for barking, over and over; tightly bound paper like a Millwall Brick. The dog would cower, desperately trying to reduce her mass to fit into any cranny away from each blow. There was a blundering rage in her face when she did this. At that moment, when beating her dog, you could see she wasn't in control – not really. She was the culmination of prolonged difficulty: lessons of violence and discipline learned through generations of experience. When my nan started having trouble walking, she had her dog put down – the traditional protocol back then for unwanted pets.

It took me years to recognise why I was and still am a passive observer – a non-player. Sitting on that sofa in my nan's living room, watching her play, I could not separate these two states of being; my nan, the doting grandmother, and my nan, the beater of small animals. To my brother, it didn't matter because animals weren't people, they were things.

I remember how similarly I felt when I refused to stand for Princess Diana's funeral on the tele. Sitting on that sofa in our living room, I felt dislocated from what I thought to be a strange and weird scenario. I tried to convince myself that it all made sense, that standing was the right and most reasonable thing to do and that I was the one being abnormal. There was something stopping my arms and legs from moving. I felt a willful paralysis pull my body down, further into the seat, silently with passive revolt I absorbed

the look of frustration and disappointment on my mother's face.

My dog at Mum's house was severely underweight for most of her life. Her wellbeing had always been upstaged by everything else going on at home. How could I stand to some rich person's funeral, someone I didn't know, someone completely alien to me, when my dog was begging for food every day and getting nothing but potatoes. My brother was always agreeable, the kind of child who would stand, who would do what Mum asked of him. He performed his social role without question, which also meant he qualified for more beatings than me. I think opting out as much as I did excluded me as a target of our Mum's castigation.

Animal Rights like Anti Fascism was such a prevalent gateway into radical left politics for many working-class kids, including myself. Speaking from experience, I know that my relationship to animal liberation movements and anti fascism alike is so much to do with the battles I have with my identity. Defending and fighting for the lives of beings with little or no power for me, is about revisiting trauma and trying to change the ending. It's about black and white thinking; trying to section off the innocent with the defenceless and trying to separate ourselves off from the indefensible. Being unable to consolidate my grandmother into the imperfect, complicated individual she is, is the traction from which the internalised classism, the self hatred, departs.

I haven't mentioned the acts of racist violence I witnessed growing up, or the way it felt to hold racist beliefs in my earlier years, because this process of writing isn't about defending myself now as an adult and using the suffering of others to do so. Like Animal Rights, Anti Fascism is about cutting ourselves away from identities that are closely linked to our own. To soothe ourselves of the mental ill health our violent pasts have caused. This is one of the reasons why we turn our backs on our families and assimilate ourselves into respectable middle-class culture.

The cycle of hatred is insidious and manifests in ways that only serve to denigrate our culture and give so much power to the risen classes.

Throughout my teen years I became more familiar with middle-class people. I was given the mobility and space to look beyond my own family and to see how others lived, to observe their families and to contrast them with my own. I became bitter and hateful towards people like my nan, people who normalised violence, taking out their vitriol on beings with less power, whether animals or children. But it's totally fine to beat children and animals, no? To be seen, heard, loved, educated are monstrous needs when there is no energy left to give beyond survival.

I started to think about class very early on in my life. I saw a real difference between my middle-class friends' and working-class friends' homes and families. Beatings, screaming, neglect, domestic abuse and abuse of animals was rife in the working-class community I grew up in. From what I could see, in middle-class homes, the people were gentle, non-violent. Nothing was grotesque, animals had toys and beds, got pedicures and the kids were fair-weather and grew up to be really good and really excited about life, generally. These middle-class kids were and as adults are present and active in their own lives, not simply watching it happen to them, with little control. The lives of these happy and well rounded kids are only made possible by the slow and bleak grind of lives lived by others; their counterpart – a black mirror, the other side of the fence.

Having more opportunities than my parents, being more socially mobile gave me access to resources they could only dream of. A supported and less precarious life filled with love and space for exploring should be celebrated of course, but for me, for the most part, it was code switching, it was learning to behave in a certain way that wasn't comfortable or what I was used to.

I was toeing the line of respectability that I didn't decide for myself: I must be more polite, more charming, have a neutral accent, hide my neuroses, I must erase parts of myself and my history that make me less digestible, this was the only way I could navigate being part of a class I felt wasn't meant for me. Entering the middle class is an aggressive experience, and now, though it holds the illusion of being an ever widening and expanding sphere, absorbing everyone and everything in its path, it does so at the cost of further marginalising the poor. Becoming part of the property owning class, or being financially stable is no longer a plausible option for most.

Code switching allowed me to be party to casual classism on every level, from within political organising to subtle and repetative acts of excluding people from communities, spaces, social spheres. Growing into the scenes of the radical left meant disowning and distancing myself from political organising that wasn't considered correct discourse. Rather than trying to move these movements forward, I pandered to the belittling of people who found themselves at the centre of discord. I no longer talked about the rights of animals but rather the people within the movement who were considered too left of field to be taken seriously. Rather than participating in collective learning, I, us, many, reject Animal Rights organising for being tone deaf, not intersectional enough and run by idiots who don't know how to work with people. Anti-fa kids are just macho uneducated hooligans – and lets not forget – total liabilities.

I've seen the difference between how people who never knew precarity and those who did embrace activism. generally, to be campaigners or dissenters on the luckier side of power relations often meant doing activism as a do-good-fuck-you to the state, whilst people from precarious backgrounds, or those who face oppression, are simply trying to find a place for their weary and broken minds, a form of solace and therapy; though from the

outside, it may look the other way round. Beyond codes of class, race, and gender, many people, especially in anti-oppression work, often participate in the struggle as a way of trying to fix a part of themselves that is broken. But on top of this, not having the language, the education or behaviours to exist neutrally in these spaces means there is a whole other level of antagonism to cope with. To work amongst people more fortunate than you and to be ridiculed, condescended or ignored for not quite understanding the rules of leftist organising, is a punch in the face and a symptom of the unequal playing field. What is considered 'horizontal organising' is often perfunctory, and ultimately nothing more than complicity in oppression – a road to hell – paved with confused and selfish intentions.

I used to be so angry, so upset that I didn't get a more gentle childhood, that cuddles weren't tainted with the previous nights alcohol fuelled fights. Cuddles weren't a thing I wanted from a family that scared me, within which there were people I didn't trust. People who were so miserable that I was petrified of the future to come.

I also know that a lot of my experiences growing up weren't entirely each individual caretakers fault, things were more difficult, being working-class is harder. Raising kids, working full time and living in unsafe places takes its toll. Knowing this curtails my processing and sends me back into a spiral of guilt and sorrow for not being better with my family and not supporting them as much as I could. Part of me often thinks 'am I setting this stage to make it easy to keep running away?'.

I also know that individual agency still exists and as an adult now I have to do a lot of reflection, a lot of undoing of learned behavior to ensure I don't remain an actor in an abusive and violent narrative, so I can have friends, so I can be supported by the people I am lucky to have around me, and in turn, support

them. This would've been impossible If I'd stayed lost and angry like my mother and like my grandmother.

My Mum would always need to rationalise her partner's abuse: "people who got hit as kids become hitters as adults" like it was some sort of excuse that cancelled individual responsibility – that I must try my best to understand why she does the things she does. My Stepmum didn't have any choice and one day the table will turn and I can unleash all of my sadness and guilt and illness on to some other vulnerable child, adult, or animal. I just had to be patient and bide my time: What even is choice?

I'm frustrated. I am frustrated that I have to put my childhood into words, reflect so much on my past for fear of repeating the same dismal mistakes. Being an alcoholic, dependent on an abuser – the fear of being alone, being an elderly woman completely and utterly alone. God, I hope I have a better future than that. I hope the kids I know today know that they are safe with me.

They say it's not about liking family, it's about unconditional love and respect. I struggle with letting go of the debt I owe to my mother, to my nan. Without them I wouldn't be here, right? And regardless of what's happened, my nan is elderly, and she needs the support of family. I am angry at my nan. I am angry that she was so treacherous, to my mother, to her dog.

Resentment is a toxic and insidious virus feeding on struggling families, yet we somehow fail to identify it in the present, fail to inoculate ourselves before it consumes us inside and out. The resentment comes from fixating all of that contempt, helplessness, toil, and scarceness on the beings that need you the most. The thing that has no choice but to depend on you. It can't go away, that dependent thing shadows you, offering no way out. Waiting for that next pound to transfer itself into a bowl of mash for the dog.

I distanced myself from my family beyond repair. I did this because I'd internalized all of my wounds from childhood and equated them with being working-class. That being abusive was what being working-class meant, and still today I am undoing this logic. Still today, I am tight-roping between being ashamed–broken–deficient and faking it through with a bumbling kind of neutral accent, overly polite mannerisms and hashing out what bits of my persona are good affectations and which are bad ones. More specifically, I'm almost good at hiding my mental ill-health and my working-classness – another way of erasing a culture that has been so royally pissed on and downtrodden that there is nothing left but people like me and the false monsters we blame and beat and the silent and lonely people like my nan.

I read so many stories of how difficult growing up working-class is and I know I'm adding to the injury by even insinuating white working-class families are nothing but abusers and racists. It is a marker of how damaged and how internalized this sort of classism is: *I ran away and now I'm safe enough to speak about these things.* But working-class people – especially within the cycle of poverty, have learned so well how to hurt each other. The crushing of working-class mobilisation means the state no longer needs to work hard to hurt us. We do it so well by ourselves, we learn to hit each other, treat our companions with disrespect, we shut ourselves off because strength and resilience is about learning to be alone, celebrating isolation, we blame other vulnerable people for our destitution. The embracing of difference, inclusion, and solidarity with one another is what makes a Working Class formidable. Whether whites are beating on their kids, or blaming working-class people of color for their misery, we have become abusers, we do the job of the state by maintaining the pecking order while people with power sit back and watch.

Pricks.

Things were bad, things are getting worse. Some of us are running away from our pasts, or ham-fisting ourselves into single issue politics like deluded saviors, or chatting some neoliberal bull-crap concept about hacking the system or viral organising. Our Heritage, our histories, our working-class-ness is being exploited not only by the state, but often by us, through othering, differentiation, or fetishisation. We use our identities to either isolate and further marginalise those we should have solidarity with, or make deals with the devil to buy up space for ourselves within the middle class, it is two sides of the same coin.

Two years ago, I hit a wall; I was homeless, exhausted and running out of non-exhausting options. I experimented with the idea of returning to my family for a while. I thought, maybe I could revive bonds back in my hometown. I had this nostalgic image of helping my nan out around the house, weeding and gardening, lamenting on our shared history, her history and more curiously, on her life before she had kids, a time where I presumptively and naively measured her as being completely and totally herself.

It's quiet in my nan's house. She woke me up with a cup of tea, placing it on my bedside table. I pushed myself out of bed and went downstairs. Nan was already sat in her spot, the same armchair for over twenty years. I asked if she needed anything, the answer was (and would always be) no. I sat down, in the same position I did as a child, my feet no longer hanging in the air but resting ruefully on the carpeted floor.

My nan stared quizzically for a moment, then finally turned towards the TV, raising the remote for the Emmerdale omnibus. I'd have to repeat anything I'd say, forgetting that her hearing isn't so good and I stutter when I'm self-conscious. She'd stare at me, unable to contain her discomfort, the corners of her lips still quivered.

I had no idea whether she wanted me there or not. Like my Mum, she was so unnerved and frustrated by my ineptitude for following social rules, to correctly participate. I sat in the same place, feeling that same disconnect I did as a child.

The conversation would be fractured, I couldn't find a topic that suited both mine and her interests, silence filled the space, nan equally unable to participate, to meet me halfway.

We glared at each other

into nothing

into dead ends.

into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends.
into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends.
into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends.
into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends.
into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends
into dead ends. into dead ends. into dead ends.
into dead ends. into dead ends.

Universal

Ade Rowe

Squalor,

decay,

poverty,

hatred.

All these things designed by the Government to keep them succulent, fat, greedy, in charge.

Thousands upon thousands of lives ruined.

Universal Credit
.
A fucking joke.

Can't go down to the local jobcentre to see some smug twat who thinks you're scum and is doing everything in your best interests, because you've been selfish enough to have a stroke?

SANCTIONED.

Your wife and kids have just been killed in a traffic accident, and you can't get online to update the diary that they gave you to document your work search?

SANCTIONED.

No money.

No joke.

They get a pat on the back for cutting your benefits. Benefits that the 'law' says you are allowed to have each month.

If it's the law. Shouldn't it be against the law to cut that lawful amount down?

The law is an ass.

An arse.

A fucking stinking arse.

The only way to stop this humility is to rise up.

Why don't people rise up?

Because they are taught that if they do something wrong, they will be punished, jailed, or even killed.

Are they going to kill everyone in the country?

No.

Who's going to pay their taxes then?

Who's going to do their dirty work?

Who's going to stroke their egos?

The prisons haven't got enough room to 'house' everyone.

If everyone, and I mean everyone, stopped being afraid, stood up and fought back, there is nothing they could do.

They would topple to the gutter like the scum that they are.

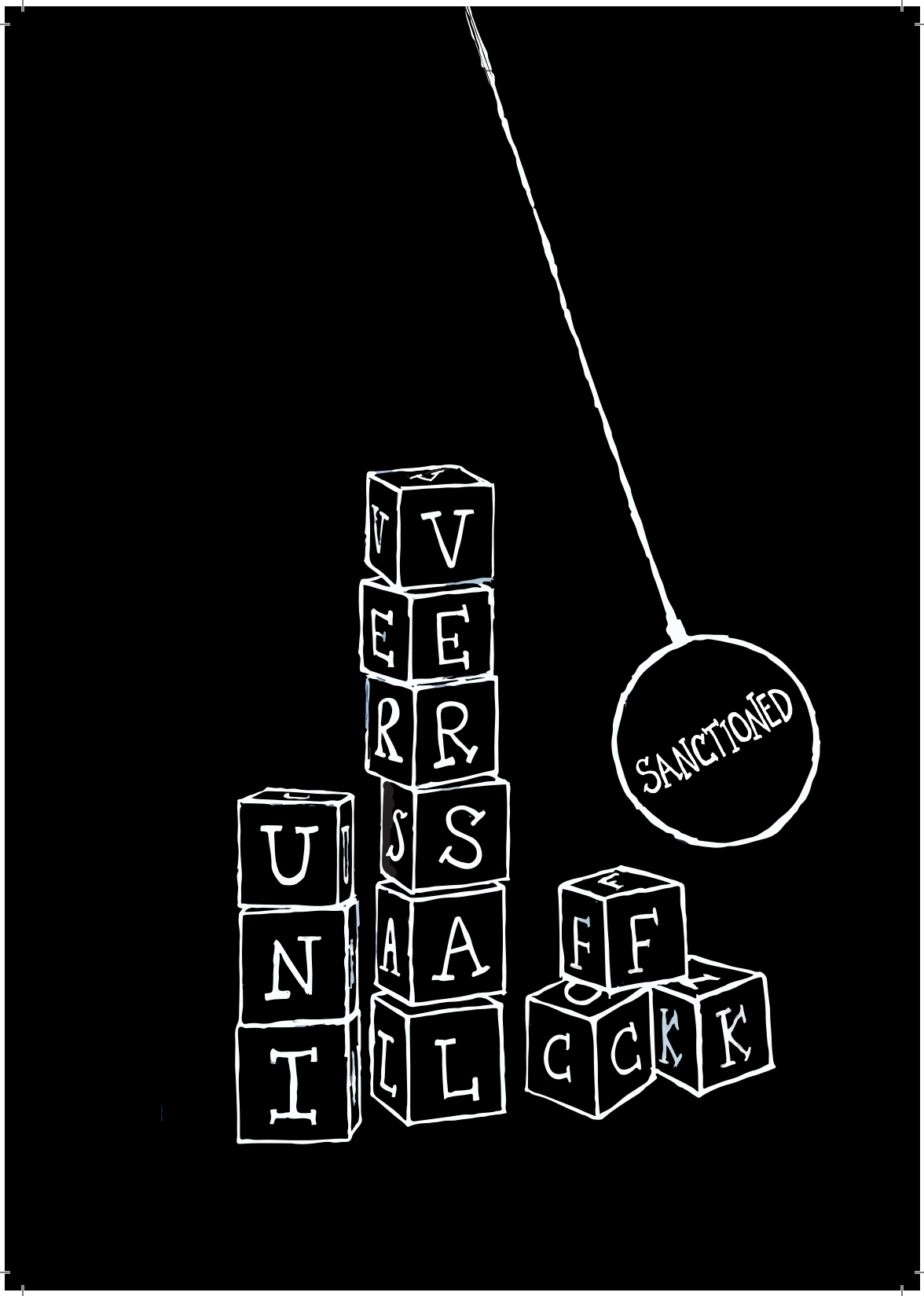
Or they would just destroy everyone anyway, but that's what they are doing now.

Universal credit.

Universal.

Togetherness.

Bullshit.


UNIVERSAL
SANCTIONED
FUCK

What Are Socialists For?

K. Kemp

Throughout history socialist movements have often been spearheaded, at least in part, by people from outside the working class, those such as academics, who have access to the most conventional means of developing their political theory. In fact, until recently, they were some of the only people who were even literate. In 1917 only about a quarter of Russians could read and write. It's no small wonder that Lenin and other university educated socialists were the ones to take the helm of the revolutionary movement.

Fast forward to 2019 and the UK is being ground down beneath the weight of decades of Conservative rule (yes that includes New Labour) and the state of the working class is growing increasingly precarious. You could be forgiven for expecting to find strong working-class organisations

at the root of the class struggle in 21st century Britain. However, when rubbing shoulders with the RCG (Revolutionary Communist Group), Plan C, and the various Trotskyist factions of the city, it begins to feel a lot like 1917, but not in any of the good ways.

Apparently the vanguard of the masses is either a collection of scrawny students, or a small group of old men with some very colourful opinions on "Identity Politics". I was quickly made aware of the sexual assault scandals surrounding a troubling number of the groups that fall into the latter camp, so I decided my best bet was with the students.

One of the many charms of this country is how you can tell so much about someone's socioeconomic background just by listening to their accent. The cadence was a dead giveaway: these people weren't from my neck of the woods. But I decided to be open-minded, after so long at the seat of neoliberal "End Of History" ideology, to be openly socialist at all they must be serious. I scolded myself for judging them so readily. They weren't serious. It would turn out that I had a lot to learn.

Between the LARPers (Live Action Role Players), who want to collect Soviet paraphernalia and tear each other to shreds over interpretations of their favourite sentences written by people who actually engaged in revolutionary work, and the casual participants, who just seem to really like a good march, it became clear that wherever I had just ended up, it was not where the class struggle was happening. My encouragement to get these middle-class socialists engaging with the actual

working class of their city and putting some of that education to use helping people get to grips with class politics was met with... well, what's the opposite of enthusiasm?

Of course the working class of this country already know all too well where they stand. We've no need for well-off kids to wander into the parts of town they've been warned to avoid to explain to us lowly commoners how society is structured. The working class is lacking in the time, energy, and belief in their own agency to actually exercise their political power as a class, we are not lacking in eyesight. If people from more advantageous economic backgrounds want to make themselves useful, they need to actually speak to workers and ask them what they need. You'll find that when those needs are met, people are very eager to engage politically. There's a reason, for all its reactionary politics, that Britain has such a strong working-class history. People know which side their bread is buttered on.

These suggestions were politely placed on the back-burner, after all, there was a demonstration to plan. The work of politically organising with actual human beings would have to wait, the students need to awkwardly march in silence waving whatever flag has been handed to them that day. Surely this will put an end to class society? We even printed out some cool flyers!

So I was faced with a question, and as far as I'm concerned the entirety of the British Left is faced with the very same question: What are socialists for? I would hope that most of us would answer some

variation of "Bringing about an end to capitalism and liberating the working and oppressed people of the world". So operating under the assumption that you, dear reader, more or less agree with that as our long term goal, I have to ask: What the fuck have any of the major socialist groups in the UK done to move us toward that goal since the turn of the century?

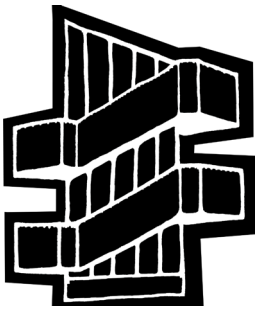
In generations past, British workers fought for and won the eight-hour working day, they organised strikes that could topple governments (ask Edward Heath where his majority went). The likes of Engels and Lenin wrote confidently that one of the likeliest candidates for socialist revolution was surely the United Kingdom.

Today, I'm reading statements by people who left the RCG because of their failure to properly deal with abuse cases. I'm watching factions split over transphobia. I'm reading spicy polemics and hit pieces British socialists write about each other online. Meanwhile the Tories are stripping our public services and funneling people entering the workforce into insecure "gig economy" jobs that make collective bargaining more difficult than ever.

I do not believe parliamentary politics is a realistic path for creating a new system, for achieving democratic control of production and resources, but the working class of this country is among the most class conscious in the western world, and there is an incredibly rich history of struggle that we owe our every breath to. And that the working class has been politically activated in recent years, in a

way they haven't been since the 80s, almost entirely around the Labour Party.

Class struggle means meeting people where they are right now. Today. I implore all British socialists, especially those who are not working-class themselves, to put down the polemic pen and actually engage with the burgeoning left wing political movement that's happening right now. Work with Labour, or engage with people to bring them further left, or try to push for policies that will take the pressure off those building dual power. I won't tell you the correct path, but I will tell you, you'll never even take the first step until you get out of your cliques and work with us, the people. The British working class have made one thing clear through centuries past. We will lead you. Not the other way around.



Working Class at University

Grace Carman

I went to the university of East Anglia (UEA) to study English Literature in 2014,. UEA isn't like Oxbridge, or like any other elite institutions. It doesn't have colleges, it doesn't have the offspring of millionaires sauntering about, it doesn't have a lavish culture of balls and robes. What it does have is droves of middle-class students, a comparatively radical history, and a lot of brutalist concrete.

The fact that UEA wasn't lavish, impossibly old, or filled with privately educated students drew me in. On the open day I attended I was met with kind and welcoming students. I immediately felt at home and at ease. It helped that I already knew Norwich well, the city I still live in.

My university experience was shadowed, though, by a tension within myself. A tension that had been brewing for a long time, as my friendship group became increasingly saturated with middle-class friends the further I got into education. The more trips to Starbucks I was taking, the bigger my friends houses

got, the more people I knew who'd been privately educated. I slowly became aware that I was alone in my low-income working-class background. This was true at my Sixth Form college, but especially true at university.

The current high university tuition fees seem to be designed to put poorer students off from going to university. Not wanting to be in debt is the most common reason I've heard from teenagers I've worked alongside in cafes for not wanting to pursue higher education. I tell these teenagers the things I wish I'd known at their age, which I did eventually learn and was the reason I was able to go to university: You might never pay back your loans; It doesn't work like normal debt; You can get great bursaries if you come from a low income background; Student finance isn't hard to navigate. My parents didn't initially support my decision to apply to universities because of the enormous fees, but once I learned how the loans worked and relayed this to my parents, they were on board. Many don't get much further in than the fear of debt.

The middle-class students around me at university really struggled with money: they weren't given much in loans, didn't get bursaries, and their parents had to give them a lot of money. In comparison, because I came from a low income background, I got a good loan and the full bursary from Student Finance England. I also got a means tested bursary from UEA (which I've just learned will be cut by up to £500 next year) and a cash reward from UEA for getting AAA in my A-Levels. Some saw this as unfair, knowing I wasn't struggling with money at all, but if my parents had to pay my rent, I wouldn't have been there to have a disagreement with them.

I can't speak for the experience of being a working-class student at an elite institution. I can only imagine that kind of pain. Caryl Phillips a black, working-class author from Leeds who went to

Oxford as a scholarship student in the 70s, visited a seminar I took during my masters degree. He said that he hated university. His visit to Norwich was well timed with a long breakdown I was having, feeling that I didn't fit in, feeling there wasn't a place for me in academia which I was hoping for a career in, and hearing that he hated university - and was now a Harvard professor - was incredibly comforting. I was allowed to hate university if I felt that way. I was right that this institution wasn't 'for' me. During our Q&A with him, I kept probing him with desperate, class-related questions, hoping for more validation. I don't know if he noticed this, but it was clear he was long past this particular crisis.

I can speak for the experience of being one of the few working-class students in a sea of the middle class. And I can tell you that working-class students are horribly underprepared for university. There is so very little support for them. I went into university not knowing the grading system, for example, assuming I would be given a letter grade for my work. Instead my first piece of work got a 2:2 and I had to learn all about the grading system from Wikipedia. Simple things like this are an absolute non-issue for students whose parents went to university. They're already part of the culture and already know its language. But for us first generation students, university truly is a whole new world. I was shocked in particular with the attitude of middle-class students, their sole desire to 'scrape a 2:1', a phrase I never stopped hearing for three years. The need for an 'easy First', avoiding tutors who grade harshly, never finishing the assigned reading. University was a game they needed to play to obtain to get their piece of paper, their degree. I'm not trying to paint myself as the perfect, precocious student, but I went there because I didn't want to stop studying literature. I didn't have a career plan, and I wasn't sure what a degree could do for my future. I'm still not sure.

The culture at university assumes a middle-class status from its students at every point, from the tutors to the books themselves.

I made several mistakes in my first year, like using the word 'chav' in a seminar, which I didn't know, in my working-class Essex sphere, was verboten. I hadn't heard of Owen Jones' book *Chavs*, nor Jones himself. I was telling the story of the time as a child I performed at my local church as 'Chav Mary' (my original, cringey character) in a Christmas variety performance, putting a topical 2006 spin on the classic story of an unplanned pregnancy – and I was chastised by the tutor for using that word. Before I read Chavs a year later, I didn't even know people who weren't working-class used the word, especially not in such disgusting ways shown by Jones' examples. In my school it denoted the kids who dressed in a certain way, in trackies and trainers with Nike, Adidas, etc. They were probably more well-off than me, my parents would never shell out for branded trainers. This tutor chastised me and said it was offensive to the working class. I didn't yet have the confidence to assert who I was and where I was from.

I was scolded by another tutor in that first year for 'generalising' about the working class. I was always assumed to be talking about a far-off group. My sister had this same experience at university a few years later. During a lecture, she studies Nutrition, the pay of workers in food factories was brought up. The lecturer talked about these 'poor', primarily Eastern European workers and the pittance they have to live on – 'can you imagine living off that?' My sister doesn't have to imagine, our Dad works in a factory that prepares and packages onions. But, of course, that section of society isn't supposed to be in those rooms. They are the spoken-about, not the speakers.

I did find working-class friends, eventually, at university and I was able to air all my grievances with them. Especially with one of my best friends, Steph, who also hated the air of entitlement around the middle-class students. Talking constantly about the grade they 'deserved'. We talked about the fact that where they tended to blame their tutor, the university, the syllabus, we tended to look

inwards and blame ourselves. I didn't read enough, I should have started my research earlier, I knew that conclusion was rushed, I'll try harder next time. We both have a tendency to beat ourselves up, but we knew there was something wrong with blaming other people and thinking that you can buy a degree. The fact that they were paying £27,000 was always brought up when something didn't go their way. We ended up defending the university that made us feel left out, in as far as it wasn't their fault some student got a 67, not a 70, on an essay about Modernist Literature.

My confidence in who I was grew the more authors I found from working-class backgrounds, like Caryl Phillips, Kit de Waal, and the late Andrea Levy. I went from angry, upset, and holding it all in, to angry, upset, and writing about it. As a result, I created an MA dissertation I truly believed in, arguing for the existence of an Intersectional English Literature that we can find in authors like de Waal and Levy, who write on the intersection between class and race in the UK. I included other authors and had a piece of writing that talked about class, race, religion colourism, gender, sexuality, disability – the many intersections present in the UK. Four out of five of the pieces I wrote during my masters degree were primarily about class. It took me a while to get there, to get the confidence to assert myself and be proud of my difference, especially in the world of English Literature which does not have the level of diversity of many other courses. It is primarily white, middle-class women.

The fact that I was writing about class does not mean I'd made peace with it. Combined with burnout, depression, and severe social anxiety that had turned into agoraphobia, I really struggled through my masters. This was once again another step up in education where the culture became, well, posher. I felt very alone for many reasons during my masters, but being discouraged from pursuing a PhD on working-class writers pushed me over the edge. I was a walking breakdown.

Andrea Levy spoke in an interview in 2014 about the difficulty of being a working-class child in a middle-class education system, 'You were working-class and nobody thought that you could be bright because you didn't show any of the signs of it. If you grow up in a middle-class house and you've got books, and you've read, you show signs of that. You might have gone to the theatre, you might know who Shakespeare was. And because you couldn't give all those codes to teachers, you were thick.' Reading this, as research for my masters dissertation, gave me the language to comprehend my experience of education: I was always bright, but rarely did I have the codes my middle-class friends had. Once I had the codes, I could at times masquerade as middle-class, but usually something would trip me up. A reference, a place I'd never been to, a type of food I'd never eaten. Now I'm not interested in passing as something I'm not, nor do I want to be.

In 2015, in another interview, Levy mentioned that "when I was growing up, there was (what I know now to be a blip) the Welfare State, where people from the working class could be upwardly mobile – to change class was a standard thing. Someone like me could get a good education and then go to a university or college. I became middle-class. [...] I was working-class. I was told at school that I could go and work in a shop, that was all I could hope for. But the system did allow people to come through." She was right, the social mobility commission has recently proven that social mobility has been 'virtually stagnant' since 2014, the year I entered university. Since then, 'class privilege [has] become more entrenched.' There's now evidence for all the pain I felt.

I don't have any unrealistic notions that I can single-handedly persuade the Tories and universities to encourage working-class young people to go to university and give better guidance to first generation students who go through higher education alone. I've seen my disabled mother mistreated, discriminated against, and repeatedly stripped of benefits: I have no notion

that the government cares about us. I do think though, that we can educate ourselves, we can educate our own, and encourage young people to fight for their education and the right to pursue their talents. We can vote for a government that isn't trying to widen inequality.

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Impoverishment of Thought

Mick Harvey

On a works night out a few years ago, a workmate put a question to me that took me off-guard. "You're fuckin smart... How come you don't act smart in work?" he asked. I wasn't quite sure to take this as a compliment or an insult. He must have read a blog post of mine linked to on Facebook, I guessed. I didn't have a good answer to his question, really, but I thought to myself it was relatively obvious that cleaning up spilled pints and vomit wasn't the best time to start discussions about economics and political theory. But it made me think. Why was it that there was no context in our work for this aspect of our life? In what way did our environment occlude me and my friend from each other? Was there something about the place that inherently delimited our conversations, our thoughts?

These kinds of questions have a long pedigree in one form or another in left thought. Marx wrote about the alienating effects of the work day on the average factory worker, whilst Gramsci expounded at length in his *Prison Notebooks* over the possibilities

of working-class intellectual life, and the barriers and impediments to it. The context in which those questions were posed may have changed beyond all recognition in the intervening years, but nevertheless, the issues remain fundamentally the same.

Indeed, in the contemporary moment – perhaps more so than in Marx or Gramsci's times – a noticeable disconnect prevails between left discourse and the people it claims to represent. Relatively few prominent contemporary commentators, writers, activists and organisers come from the working class – indeed, I can think of only a handful. Fewer still are those who remain working-class. Here I want to outline just one of the reasons that this might be so. I think it's not sufficiently remarked upon within the left tradition that being poor, and doing poor work, can contrive to dull the intellect and ultimately make you stupid.

There are probably a number of reasons that this hasn't been well noted. It's an inherently stigmatising claim to make about others – and an embarrassing claim to make about oneself. But it's important to make clear that rather that marking out a group of people as deficient in some way, what I'm trying to do is identify and outline a set of interlocking and mutually reinforcing processes – we might tentatively call them lumpenisation – which poor people are subject to. And to point out that the effects of these processes on individuals surely have their own varied political and social effects – not least the calamities of Brexit and the global fascist ascendency.

These thoughts have developed out of a peripatetic twenties spent moving between education, benefits, and a series of more or less crap jobs: low paid, notionally low-skilled, and filled largely by some of the worst off and most marginalised in our society. Working as a cleaner, or stacking shelves, or in a call centre (the kinds of jobs I here want to roughly designate as 'poor work'), I have noticed, tends to produce particular kinds of mental states,

affects, and subjectivities. It is these states I want to explore here. Broader questions, such as the historical development of these issues, and the possibilities for their collective amelioration, must be more fully considered elsewhere.

In a time of bifurcating labour markets in the UK and worldwide, increasing numbers of people find themselves on the wrong side of the division – subject to the caprices of ever more demanding work and welfare regimes, and with fewer opportunities to extricate themselves. While some find themselves in well paid, highly skilled jobs, at the bottom, the distinction between work, workfare and welfare continues to blur – each functioning more and more now like different arms of the same relentless disciplinary machine. On rolling standby for intermittent mobilisation, the reserve army of labour is caught within a work-welfare nexus which is difficult, if not outright impossible to escape.

Within this context, poverty and poor work pose an astonishing number of challenges for the people who find themselves tangled within them. Some of the difficulties which come with welfare cuts, low pay and unpredictable hours are obvious and well-attested to. A recently published UN report shows that, in the UK, the difficulties those in poverty face attempting to meet basic needs, for food, shelter, clothing, and energy are widespread and significant. As the report pointed out, most of the people living in poverty in the UK are in work.

In such a dire context, unfortunately, the problems of the diminution of possibilities for a fulfilling intellectual life are far from the most pressing. Yet it is morally, socially, and politically significant that those who are working-class and have a desire to develop their intellectual capacities and cultural life will increasingly find themselves shut out as their opportunities, aptitudes, and capacities are gradually and consistently undermined and diminished. Over time this process is sure

to stunt the broad analytical and critical apparatus of the left in general. When critical analysis itself is constructed within social life as a luxury good, available only for those with wealth and leisure, the possibility of analysis is damaged. A critical perspective only realised as an adjunct to wealth can surely only be a debased, partial perspective. Voided of a crucial element of insight to which it always must ultimately refer, the left will come to find itself increasingly unable to adequately face the manifold dangers which presently confront it.

There are a number of material and practical impacts that being poor has on one's ability to be intellectually engaged with the world. Any outgoings which don't meet day-to-day needs are sidelined and, over time, gradually forgotten about. Maintaining an interest in books is often prohibitively expensive. In particular, especially new, obscure, or academic books can be very costly. Maintaining any kind of meaningfully intellectual and critical life, and keeping up to date with ongoing debates all but demands access to such material. Invariably, the little money left over from bills and food has to be rationed out for whatever small pleasures life allows. Twenty pounds spare means a choice between buying a hardback or a night out socialising. Libraries, and more recently, ebooks are obviously invaluable here, and both have proven so for me in difficult times. But, like the rest of the civic supports in this country, libraries are being gutted, whilst accessing e-books requires internet access, and is difficult to do legally. But even with access to these resources, for those of us with even slightly niche interests, there's so much material that simply isn't easily available in any way other than by buying it. For those unable to spend money on books, maintaining an understanding of contemporary debates is difficult, and as a result some distance from these all but inevitable.

Another set of material impacts are important here, and mean that the time, physical and mental energy needed to devote

to intellectual work is often in short supply. There's the simple effect that physically demanding work has on the body. When returning home from work tired, any good intention to, say, read a chapter of a book can easily ebb away once the fatigue of the day fully asserts itself. It's endlessly dispiriting to find oneself in the middle of the evening, eyes straining, struggling to read for the fifth time the same page of some dense tract that exhaustion has rendered unintelligible. At that point it's easiest to just admit defeat, close the book and do something less taxing, to go to sleep.

And with physical exhaustion comes mental strain, another tax on energy which managing a life in poverty demands. In a world of 'flexibilised labour markets' the burden placed on those in poor jobs and low incomes is as much administrative as it is anything else. A work diary which is liable to change at a manager's whim places extraordinary pressures upon people's ability to coordinate daily tasks, routines and finances. For workers with children, arranging childcare to cover shifts can require Stakhanovite feats of diligent and rigorous planning – contacting childcare, arranging for friends or grandparents to take a child for an evening or afternoon – for plans to be thrown into disarray at little or no notice at all. 'Flexible labour markets' ultimately mean that some people's time does not matter, and that these people need to shoulder the greatest burdens of planning and organising, all for business's convenience. The effect of this on one's sense of self-worth can be extraordinarily damaging. But it also ends up taking up any energy or mental firepower that might be better spent thinking about other things. The administrative load which comes with all this means there is little left over for organising more meaningful activities, or complex plans.

The physical and mental exhaustion which poor work and poverty bring about, is compounded by the experience of the workplace itself. For one, poor work almost always involves

largely giving up one's basic autonomy to another person, to a manager or overseer, for the period of a shift. The link between action and choice that grounds any basic sense of agency and self-direction is in the process severed. This leads to an ongoing and progressive atrophying of one's sense of control over one's own body, and cumulatively, one's life. With so much time spent at the beck and call of others, one becomes a mere adjunct to another's whims – gradually one's own sense of purpose and ability to render one's desires starts to ebb away and become remote. Agency becomes vague and abstracted, self-direction ephemeral.

To be sure, almost all work, by its very nature, involves doing things that wouldn't be one's first priority given the choice. But it's an altogether different, and more direct problem for those at the bottom of the rung. In better roles and workplaces, there's the possibility to suggest ideas for particular projects, to develop one's own ways of achieving a particular end, to choose in what order and sequence to complete a set of tasks, and even occasionally to undertake tasks which allow for genuine challenge, creativity, and self-expression. All these possibilities allow for some sense of self-satisfaction and autonomy. On the other hand, in poor work, a given task must be done come what may. This necessity often comes also with a prescribed routine and a tight and unbending time scale, in order to better monitor and manage productivity and maximise efficiency.

The pressures on one's sense of agency these necessities produce can reach a maddening and infuriating pitch when encountering a stark disjunct between what seems logical and sensible to you, and the instructions one has been told to carry out. Doing something that you don't particularly want to do is unpleasant enough. But there's a peculiar kind of torture in having to do things that seem egregiously pointless or wasteful. This torture is complete if the work itself is laborious and difficult.

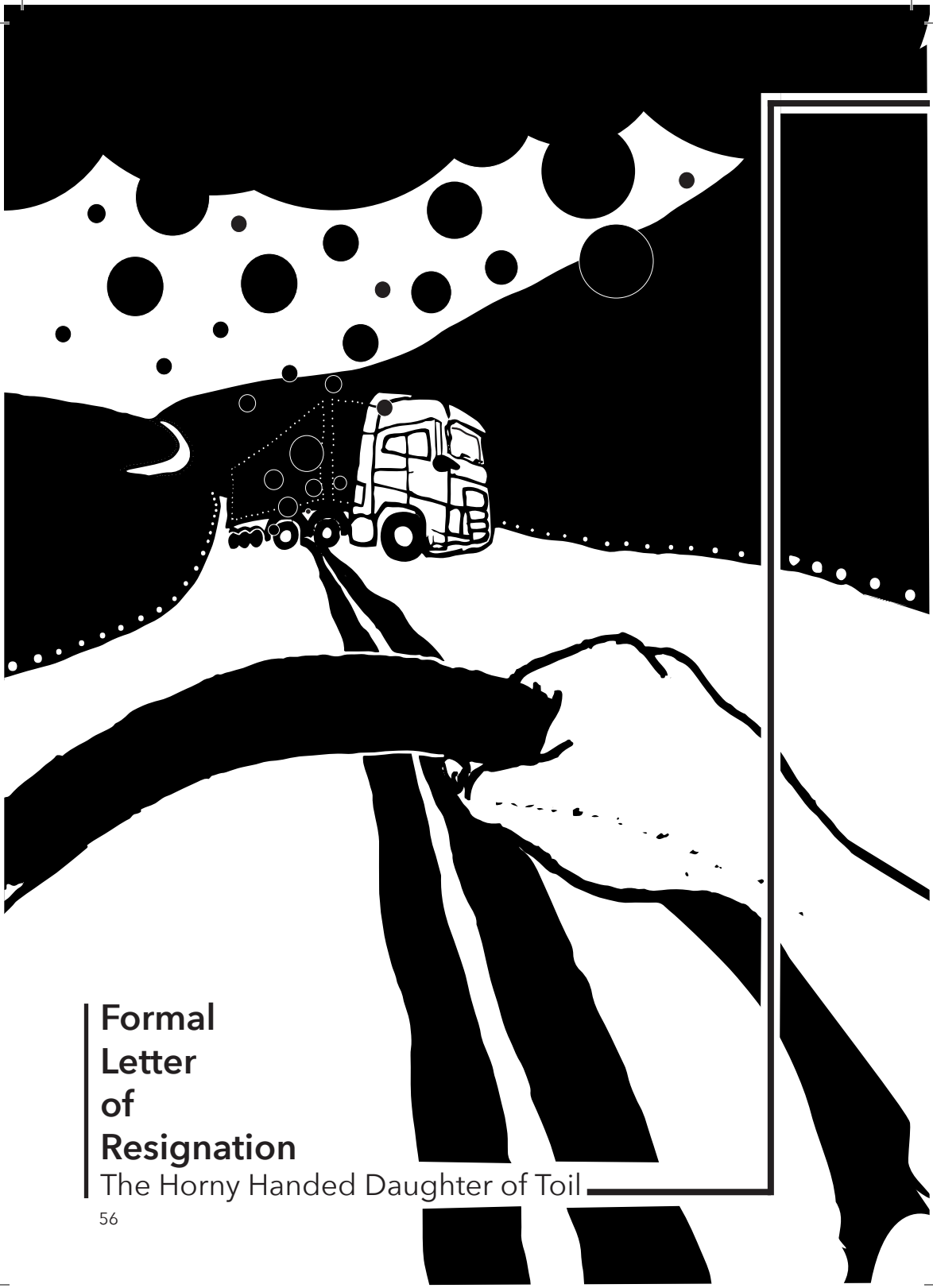
It's difficult not to feel reason itself coming under strain in trying to make sense of such moments. Suffer this for long enough, and the link between reason and action gives out – any sense of reason held onto serves only as a reminder of the irrationality of one's action, no more.

Another pressure peculiar to poor work which impacts one's ability to think is that of finding oneself constrained, daily, within the aspect of bodily efficiency. Doing work which is mostly physical reduces one to a brute physicality – performing rote actions, the body becomes a mere mechanism at the service of someone else's goals. Now, shorn of any space for articulacy, critical distance becomes radically foreshortened. Narrative, abstraction, cogency, all fall away as the horizons of the world become gradually reduced to the nub of a simple, mute, bodily present. A standardised and routine set of tasks takes the place where an expansive inner world of thought and experience might have been, or used to be. That absence is experienced most painfully in the peculiar shame of straining for words, dumb, at the end of a long week.

Symbolically as well as materially then, poverty and poor work turn the screw. As Lacan said, we come to understand ourselves and our place in the world as we every day encounter our reflected image in the eyes of others. The social world itself designates to us our position in life by placing us and ordering us within a symbolic matrix of signs – the uniform we wear, which spaces we occupy and which we don't, the way we are addressed and how we address others. Over time these facts impress on us an understanding of 'who we are' within social life. I remember times working as a cleaner when members of the public would sometimes treat me as stupid, with such visible and obvious contempt it left me with potent feelings of shame, a need to hide away. We find out who we are partly through this placement in the social world. These processes are all but

impossible to avoid. When treated as lacking in a voice, a valid perspective, or dignity, it becomes difficult to assert anything to the contrary. Cringing when someone asks 'what do you do?', or answering with evasiveness, shame gradually accumulates and overwhelms. The question of whether or not my voice has value starts to seem more and more to have an obvious answer – one expressly in the negative. Being treated as stupid, you eventually start to feel stupid, to become stupid. Internalising the projections other people have of you, you become a punch-bag within the symbolic order itself. Doing poor work eventually feels like it reflects some basic truth about oneself, and this feeling ends up impossible to shake.

All these grim facts imply a corollary, which is that thought itself comes increasingly to figure in social life as a luxury, available only to those who are lucky to have been given space and time and money enough to enjoy it. This is consonant of a time when everything in life, up to and including water and the air we breathe, has become sorted hierarchically into differential gradations of quality, that as commodities so graded thus they might more thoroughly and effectively function as mechanisms of discipline. The burdens placed upon those at the sharp end of labour markets also then include those of us bearing the weight of sapped agency, inarticulacy, and thoughtlessness. These burdens, intolerable to individuals, in aggregate become political and social dangers. The experiences of resentment, shame, and anger, which poverty and poor work brings, without a context within which they can be made intelligible, understood and overcome is a significant part of the looming calamities of Brexit and its concomitant, a resurgent far-right. It is important that these processes are adequately recognised, and some consideration given as to how they might be mitigated against, before they manifest in even uglier forms.



Formal Letter of Resignation

The Horny Handed Daughter of Toil

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to inform you that for the last few months we have been dying in our bays. Cocooned in grey plastic, disintegrating into stained grey upholstery, under stained grey skies, we have been frozen in rigour-mortis. The chain-gang works its endless shift, a string of red lights twinkling into nowhere.

I look out to the body next to me, but we don't see each other, in our grey plastic we clutch at the wheels like we have control. But I don't recognise you and you don't recognise me, we are just here to string these lights across the land and push our wares out for our master.

Our bodies are our temples, in this, the age of science. There is birdshit in our rafters, rats in our cellars, we are soldiers of futility! Battling cages! We are Hi-Viz heroes! We are grafters! But our hands are still soft as nothing we touch is real; it disintegrates as we grasp it.

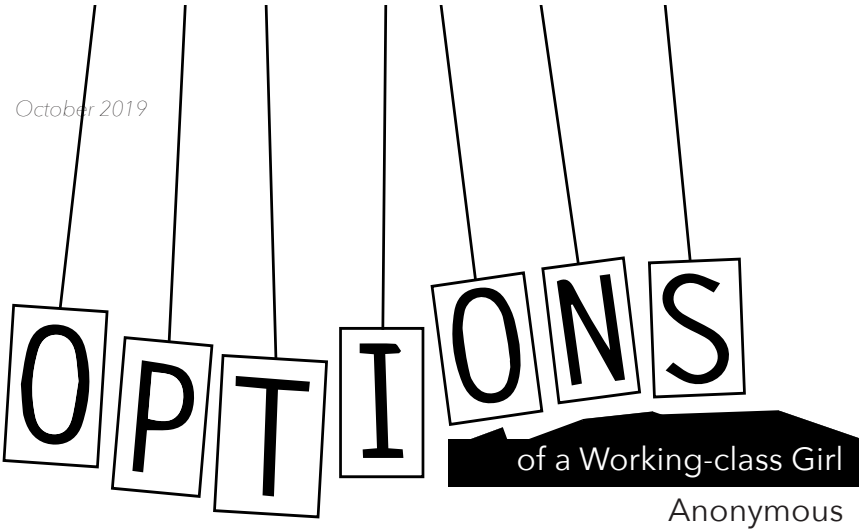
We huddle under lean-tos, and tell each other how bad we are. Our DNA is in chaos! We have sold our everything! Our very essence has been scrambled! I declare. Nothing to worry about we laugh, as we suck free radicals down into our lungs and fag ends stick, rip lips in the cold. We bare our rotting teeth like dogs and feel at home together.

And then I look up across the faces of my brothers in arms, big brothers of mine and I want to reach out and feel – are you made of soft stuff like me? Are you crumbling under Brazilian chicken and G4S prisons like me? Are you dying in your bays? Or have you died already brother?

So I hang up my frozen sausage crown. I want to live long, breathe strong, I will take my wares and my hands of toil and start a new story. Another truck needs my love now.

Yours sincerely

The Horny Handed Daughter of Toil



Anonymous

POOR = NOT BETTER OFF

Let me take you back to the 1950's and my first memories. At that time my family consisted of maternal grandparents, parents, younger brother and myself. We lived in a semi-detached rented house which had a back garden for growing vegetables, and a small front garden... for show... full of rose bushes and various bonny flowers. Only my father had a full time job, in an engineering works (although my grandfather always did odd jobs to try to earn a little extra, he would be over 70 by then). So although it never felt like we were "poor" it is obvious to me now that there was not much money around; indeed my grandmother`s mantra was "waste not want not". We habitually recycled everything as a matter of course before the word was invented. Old vests became dishcloths, old coats became rag rugs, and meals were homemade. Shoes were mended if worth the cost, or had cardboard insoles as a temporary measure. Furniture and household items were built to last and never renewed. Lino floors, no carpets. I remember that we all lived in the room where the open coal fire and dinner table was. A

front room was kept "for best" plus a tiny kitchen. Although we had a radio, there were no luxuries such as a TV, or a washing machine, or regular hot water, only a coal fire which heated water via a fireback boiler in winter, plus we had a metal electric one in the kitchen next to the washtub and mangle. The house had a (freezing cold) bathroom upstairs with an indoor toilet but we had to carry buckets of heated water upstairs to have a bath, otherwise wash in cold water. However, life was lived, it was normal to me as a child, in fact some things were still rationed in the wake of the war which had ended just before I was born and which was never talked about. I am guessing because of terrible memories including the loss of both my soldier uncles who had been killed. Ours was rather a sombre and extremely thrifty household.

Great emphasis was put on being polite and respectable, unemotional, going out well-dressed with shoes polished (even my rubber Dunlop wellington boots had to be washed). The main thing was: everything had to be seen to be kept clean and the front doorstep was regularly scrubbed and whitened with a donkey-stone, windows kept polished. All our neighbours appeared to share a similar ethos with houses looking reasonably spick and span, and nobody went out looking "scruffy", it was frowned on in those days.

Needless to say, very few families had a car unless they were what was known as "better off"; such as the local doctor solicitor or mill owner. Buses were only for longer journeys to town. Everybody walked to school which might be a mile away and mine wasn't even on a bus route.

Nowadays the above lifestyle would no doubt be classed as terrible poverty. In those days, nobody would have looked down on us or called us POOR. In our industrial village there were only a very few people who were pitied for "not managing", either

they wasted their wages in the pub or were deliberately avoiding work (of which there was plenty) or had befallen an accident or other misfortune? Note I say pitied. Any kids they had got fed at friends houses, given handed down clothes etc. all without "a song and dance". I can't actually remember being taken shopping for clothes myself, and know some were passed on from families my grandparents knew or from friends who were working as rag-sorters (there was a tradition of recycling and re-weaving cloth from rags in West Yorkshire industrial villages, with the better items first weeded out to be reworn). My jumpers were hand knitted by my mother or neighbours I think.

Likewise the "better off" weren't particularly envied, they had studied to be in a profession, would likely be from a family who historically had more status or income... it was simply the accepted order of things. Nobody spoke about aspirations for sure.

I am afraid the class system was still entrenched, which I now see helped to stifle anyone who even had an inkling to be ambitious and rise above their family situation. Mine had been staunchly working-class for generations and in the 1950s into the 1960s they like many others were grateful to be in work and not at war; in better health, with the new NHS and Welfare State giving new hope for the future. The older folks remembered the real poverty of much earlier decades which I am sure made them cautious of taking risks in life. "Just get on with it and don't complain"... "don't get fancy ideas"... "who do you/they think you/they are?"... "don't get ideas above your station"... "be thankful"...

N.B. quotes are from the language of my childhood.

Postscript: My father eventually rose up the ranks to be a works manager and my parents bought a house for £1,000 in 1960. He joined the Conservative Club and thought himself a cut above.

My brother grew up to wear a shirt and tie to work too.

Throughout my own life, I have always had to put a lot of effort into managing financially, only achieving a slightly better standard of living since my retirement and living on State Pension.

POOR = FEWER OPTIONS

Including some I never knew existed.

Shocked! I passed my 11 plus exam and was going to the Girls Grammar School.

On the last day of Primary School some kids who I hardly knew were throwing stones and calling me and the other handful of "winners" Grammar Bugs and Brainboxes. It didn't feel much like a victory to me. Being the only girl in my class who had passed the exam felt weird. The boys bragged about having bikes bought to mark their achievement for going to the (separate) more prestigious Boys Grammar School.

At home nothing changed, no reward except being bought a leather satchel followed by the putting together of the essential uniform before the September term. I was told to be grateful as it was costing money... I was not grateful and wished I was going to a Secondary Modern or the Technical College. However, my parents basked in the reflected glory that they had raised a smart child; nevertheless they held back on praising me in case I "got big-headed"... an indication of the prevailing attitude that you should not "get too big for your boots" and you were stuck with your place in life.

Once the term had started and I was going off to the new school on the bus, the moment had long since passed by and I was expected to 'get on with it', whilst still doing a few chores and amusing my younger brother, everything carried on as usual.

My shoes hurt. My blazer and serge skirt were too big. My jumper was home-knitted and not quite the right shade of cherry red. The satchel weighed a ton full of books; we had homework. Winter came and I was bought a duffel coat, rather than a belted gabardine trench coat which was the popular choice. A knitted scarf completed the slightly "off" look. It soon became obvious that although I understood things on the surface, many of the other girls had more general awareness, also knew more about classical literature and music, some had travelled to places far beyond Yorkshire. A few got help from parents and older siblings with homework, especially maths which I never mastered. I didn't care to go on school trips and besides, knew better than to ask for money. Gradually the feeling of being an outsider grew. As for hockey and netball, being quite small and slim in build I was not fast or strong enough to be any good. I quickly developed ways of getting along; nicking off the hated games lessons, mainly by staying so quiet and compliant that it was very easy to go unnoticed when missing, or stand out in any way that might lead to being bullied. Schools were not as tightly run, way before computers etc. so it was not hard to work out how to outwit their system, that gave me a small sense of achievement in itself!

Homework went in on time, I was polite and wrote good essays, copied maths by borrowing other girls books. Did not cause bother, did not shine… was I even there?

I did grow into my big blazer for a while at about age 14, then started to grow out of it, but never got a new one. If not always very happy, I wasn't particularly miserable, it was just life... which you didn't question.

When it was made clear at home that I would be leaving school as soon as I could get a job, it didn't seem like a bad idea as no other options were being presented. The school were most interested in the girls from richer families who had ambitions

for them. I guess they had been made aware of various choices which I never realised existed.

Before Grammar Schools were abolished they were seen as a way to segregate pupils from certain backgrounds and allegedly give a chance for betterment to the bright enough others who passed the 11 plus exam at 11 or 12 years old. In reality that did not always work because what was missing was the right family background to fit in. Let alone fighting what I now see as poverty and obvious worth as a wage-earner.

50 YEARS AGO and onward
what options for a young woman to rise out of poverty?

My experiences all those years ago might appear grim in the context of today's society. But we must bear in mind that children were not targeted by marketing nor treated as individuals in their own right quite as happens in 2019. "Seen and not heard" - often hardly seen - was the norm, Unless old enough or able to contribute financially. (Perhaps that was different higher up the social ladder for all I know?)

Working-class adults were from a generation who had often left school themselves between the ages of 12 and 14. They very likely never knew anyone who had been to university. Further education came with a price tag, smart girls were still scoffed at, seen as bluestockings heading for spinsterhood, because men did not, so we understood, value brains as much as good housekeeping skills and "childbearing hips".

Yes, it does sound like the Dark Ages and in many ways it was. These were the days before working-class women as a whole began to feel more empowered. We were expected (and mostly in agreement) that we would leave school and work for a while before "courting, getting engaged, and having a

modest wedding... then babies". OPTIONS… what options? Be lucky and marry a decent lad or else be regarded as a failure, or an embarrassment? A majority of girls married lads who were neighbours or brothers of their friends, or someone they got to know at work over time...

Naturally the young men we would meet were not likely to be aspirational for their wives as they were brought up with the same old values. Most often not ambitious for themselves either. If things went badly wrong it was all too easy to fall into various difficulties if you had no safety blanket to fall back on. That much has not changed. Poverty came knocking all too quickly. You needed a lot of resourcefulness if it did.

It was not the done thing to expect to go running back to parents who would be living in a small house and with no means of paying your way, far less so if you had a child as well. "You have made your own bed now lie on it" was a much repeated phrase, circa 1970…

Women couldn't get credit without a husband or parent to co-sign for them; and new divorce laws only came along in the mid 1970s. Domestic violence wasn't taken very seriously by the police. Still, it was relatively easy to find a cheap rented place to live with no need for a large deposit or fees and there was always work of some sort to be found (no long interview process, instant start... money in a weekly pay packet). However, merciless landlords legally could, and often, did put your belongings out on the street if rent was not paid. There was the Social Security office as a very last resort; but there were strict rules and too many nosy questions. Plus the shame...!

Certainly many of us were poor by today's standards but our expectations were pretty low in the first place; being oblivious to wealthy and ostentatious lifestyles which would have been

unattainable in any case. (No credit cards back then; nor as many tempting shops dangling glamorous clothes and household goods. Not even big supermarkets. Less availability of alcohol, drugs, cars, etc). One conclusion is that a new poverty prevails nowadays because so many girls (as all society) are persuaded to live beyond their means; whilst at the same time being denied OPTIONS such as fair paid employment and a choice of affordable places to live. Higher expectations and ambitions are possible maybe, the struggle for equality in all its forms has progressed a long way.

Yet the starting point of family, peoples backgrounds still influence and determines a great deal. The UK today has inequalities/ classes even more complex than fifty years ago. Because I am a woman, my account has to be from this perspective, although I am not oblivious to the wider implications of being poor for all individuals. Real poverty was hard to overcome decades ago, it still is, only some reasons for that have changed.

1980s: EARNING A LIVING as a single mother.

At the dawn of the 1980s I was a single mother with two school-age children. I decided it was not too late to go to college and study for some O-levels which I successfully did. Having realised that I was capable of learning new things, I next joined a one-off course for women in Kirklees which was run by part of the co-operatives movement, with a view to empowering women to find work. In actual fact it leaned towards teaching women to start and run their own businesses (in the most part as Co-ops). Only a very few did go on to do so because they had the financial means... however most of us were too poor to have cash to invest in anything or assets as security to borrow money!

Some of the women began to change; and then quit, under pressure from their husbands. It was an exciting time and gave

me some new-found self-belief and I made some new friends, but in the end I was still responsible for paying my bills so when the course ended after a few months, I decided to look for work in a co-op enterprise since I couldn't start one myself. There were only a few of these in my area, including Suma wholesalers and the BEANO weigh-and-save wholefood shop in Leeds. I talked to a few people and learned about another such shop in the area. It was my lucky day, they had a poster in the window asking for a new worker. Because I knew a bit about wholefoods and herbs, and co-ops, as well as having shopworking experience, I got the job. The wage was the same for all staff or rather co-op members, who worked equal hours. I loved doing the work, serving in the shop as well as packaging products, which were mostly bought in bulk from Suma. I caught the bus to work after the children went to school; it took about 30 minutes. It later got me back home for 4.30pm around the time my children got home from school, so everything seemed too good to be true.

There were four or five other people and a few part-time helpers, all of them were polite to me; a lovely chap who was much older invited me to visit his family`s organic farm and I liked them very much as even though they seemed quite well off they weren't stuck up. Everyone except me had either another source of income or a working spouse, whereas I had to try and live on my wage alone. What with bus fares, and school uniforms on top of all the other demands this was not at all easy. Also my co-workers had interests that were outside my experience (like political activism). They could pay for alternative therapies, and obviously had lives outside home and work... none of which I could afford to join in. They ate expensive vegetarian foods, often from the shop, whereas I would buy and cook anything cheap and wholesome. Probably all of the above prevented me from forming close friendships with my co-workers and set me apart. Looking back, it's hard to evaluate in full the reasons why I never became a fully fledged Cooperative member, perhaps I should

have tried harder to persevere, prove my worth; but at the time I felt under too much pressure.

In fact it was essentially sheer economics which led me to leave and move on to other work. However, there was definitely a growing awareness that I was from another background, one example was being excluded from conversations just because I had literally nothing to contribute. Being quite unaware politically, having a down-to-earth approach, noticing that some people chose to affect a sort of "hair-shirt" persona (I now wonder if to make a stance against capitalism. the significance was beyond me then though) when I was plain and simple poor and struggling to make ends meet. All of which served to make me feel uncomfortable. Even the customers were mostly middle-class people including posh students from the university nearby, who would sometimes treat me as subordinate to the more well-spoken and self-assured co-op members. Sensing condescension, assumptions that I might be less capable because of my background; or even on one occasion less honest, which was an insult... all had an effect. The main fact was it was an untenable situation financially. So much for equality!

There is a saying that some always remain more equal than others; another that you take yourself with you wherever you go! I took myself off to work in a factory for more money. Although the work was harder physically I was back in a familiar place.

I know that people from all origins can become impoverished and some others can rise out of poverty. Not my intention to be judgemental, the above basically illustrates one person's experience at former times in history.


ANIMAL FARM

I Only Went to School for My Dinner

Paul Hamnett

I suppose I had what Sociologists would call a Dysfunctional Childhood – well it certainly didn't function very well.

My parents were politically aware but not politically involved. Dad came from India, arriving here in 1948, just after independence, and supported Gandhi. Dad thought the Brits had no place in India; he was Communist leaning but fought for Britain against the Japanese in Burma. He was not a fan of Churchill – not just because he was a Tory, but because of the way he treated the Indians during their fight for independence. Mum was from Bristol, of Irish Parenthood, who never liked the Tories because of the soup kitchens, means-testing the general strike, but thought Churchill was ok until Dad told her about the way he treated the Irish and my sister's boyfriend told us about him ordering troops to open fire on striking Tonypandy miners.

Mum was welfare class, Dad was middle-class with working-class aspirations. Actually maybe I am describing myself. I try hard to be working-class, but feel guilty about where I live, what I earn, what I eat, what I listen to. Or maybe it's that classic Roman Catholic

Guilt. Back to Dad, no matter how hard or long he worked we never seemed to have enough money. Often Dad would quit his job so that he would get his week in hand and holiday money; then he could pay any rent left unpaid, which was always the case.

In the 60s Dad had a number of jobs. He worked at BAC and Rolls Royce factories and was in the union. After Paul Stephenson and Guy Bailey overturned the colour ban on Bristol Buses (with help from Tony Benn and Bristol University Students) Dad worked there too. He was a big fan of Tony Benn and always voted Labour as did my Mum.

My earliest memories of politics was that our school was closed for Polling day. This seemed to happen quite often in the 60s. I remember the estate car with a loudspeaker proclaiming "Vote Labour!", and I remember shouting Vote Labour a few years later in Lawrence Weston Bristol when one of these cars were giving the message "Vote Conservative!". I clearly remember teachers going on strike, and our school not being open, but Dad saying we should stay at home anyway. We got told off by the teacher. But I can't say I liked school anyway, only turning up there for my dinner; I learnt much more at home watching TV or visiting the library.

Due to Mum and Dad not getting on and only having Roman Catholicsim in common, our family split up in 1971, at the height of The Troubles, of which we were all very aware. My Mum simplified things to us by saying that Bernadette Devlin and Ian Paisley are "just making things worse". Anyway, we went into foster care shortly after. In the foster home I read Animal Farm, and was treated like an animal, somewhere between the diet of toast and racist humiliation was told it was not a kids book, but because it kept me quiet they let me read it. Of course I was fed the old cliché about communism and but that did not stop me reading lots more Orwell and gave me a love of reading generally. When

we got evicted, we went to live with our nan and what you might call a right Uncle Fester, social service moved us to a foster home that was no better, but Uncle Fester had already lived up to the rhyming slang*.

After foster care, we lived in St Pauls, Bristol. I truly enjoyed the year I spent there. I remember being 10 years old and my Mum warning me about the dangers of getting involved with the Street working girls. There were lots of different nationalities in St Pauls: Jamaicans, Asians, Irish, Polish, I loved it and never felt threatened. My Mum got another house this time in Knowle West, Dad came with us for a few months, and then the shit began, sadly quite literally. I thought my Dad spoke like everyone else, because I grew up with him, but only speaking on the phone to him 20 years later, did I realise he had a lilt to his voice and boy did I suffer for that at school.

School was not made easier by the fact that my Mum did not want us facing the embarrassment of starting a new school without a new uniform. However she did not want us being picked on by going to school with a uniform from a jumble sale, so to save us from that embarrassment she decided to apply to the Social for a grant. The Social Security were worse then than they are now, and refused.

Supposedly in order to save our embarrassment she then got hold of the Bristol Evening Post and told them that the Social wouldn't give us money for school uniforms, that we had been off school for a month and that the school wouldn't let us attend without a uniform (which was not strictly true). As if our embarrassment couldn't be made worse, The Evening Post ran a story about us not being able to attend school and how desperately we wanted to (complete bollocks as Dad was out of work and had moved back, and I liked being home), so the Social sent out a Social Worker who took us out to buy curtains, bedding, and uniforms.

In fairness to our parents, it was really difficult finding second hand uniforms, because it was a tricky colour, black blazer, grey or black trousers, grey pullover, and a white shirt and tie, and if we haven't got a blazer dont worry.! wherever could you pick up that sort of stuff? such difficult colours!

I know it was their right to get help from the state, but Christ again did we suffer at school and in the community, from the other kids, parents and teachers. Thanks Mum and Dad, what was it that Philip Larkin wrote?

This Be The Verse
By Philip Larkin

They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad.

They may not mean to, but they do.*

I prefer this one by Liverpudlian Beat Poet Adrian Mitchell

This Be the Worst
By Adrian Mitchell

They tuck you up, your Mum and Dad.
They read you Peter Rabbit, too.**

I remember clearly the three-day week, and that not having electricity was actually exciting for us. Often we never had electric during the day anyway (due to poverty), but playing cards by candlelight had never happened before. For me, the three-day week brought my parents closer to us kids than at any other time, but sadly it didn't last. Dad was gone when I got home one night, and after that it was back to the bills not being paid, electric being cut off (and not through strikes this time); breaking into

our own electric meter to feed ourselves, and nicking lead from school roofs. I used to play a slow relative at cards and pool for money. I'd beat him every time and win money for the family's food that way. I figured he'd only have put the money in other gambling avenues so it may as well go to my family.

By 1976 Dad had moved to Liverpool to be nearer my sister, and my sister had moved to Liverpool because her in-laws were there and her father in law had a job at Vauxhall, whether my brother in law expected a job there or not, it never happened.

Then up pops Thatcher, down goes Steve Biko (on my birthday), in comes the National Front, out goes Blair Peach – but not according to the Police (SPG), this innocent man bumped his head onto a truncheon 14 times, crushing his skull.

Not surprisingly, I became a young offender and was given probation for two years supervision for being a passenger in a stolen car. My five mates who were there at the time all got off with 12 hours physical training at the YMCA. Because we were known to Social Services I needed closer scrutiny I guess, but this environment made me pick up a few more bad habits. I fought every kid around me before I left school and would follow the aggro at football too. Thankfully it did not last long, and as soon as I realised there was no-one to break up the fights after I left school, and after a hiding that left me in hospital, I gave up fighting. In truth youth probation taught me a lot by proxy, the probation officer lined me up with a Drama Student at Bristol University, and a lovely guy called John from Liverpool told me that I could do my probation through the drama group if I was interested. I was. They taught me so much; politics, what newspapers are really saying, the way the capitalist markets exploit the poorest of us...

I managed to stay employed in a non-union organisation,

eventhough I was protesting against Apartheid, the Falklands Invasion, the Poll tax, section 28, The Battle of the Beanfield, selling off council houses, the destruction of our unions... but I think it was Thatcher's repatriation of British subjects that really wound me up, and convinced me to get involved with our local labour party. Just like Windrush today, if you never Nationalised (Proved your Identity) way back then (1940s) and if you later left the country, then you had no guarantee of coming back in. This actually happened to my Dad, and he cancelled his honeymoon in Spain, in 1991, Blackpool was much better anyway.

I really got involved in organised politics one Thursday evening. I decided to attend one of the Filwood (Bristol) CLP meetings. They met in a Social Club just off Leinster Avenue in the Knowle West area of Bristol. I arrived keenly, at 7.20 for a 7.30 start. In this quiet little shack with a bar there were about 40 characters whom I knew from Knowle West. Many nodded to me. I bought a pint and then I surveyed my comrades and brothers in arms, thinking what a good turnout it was. There were not many women though, that's something we must improve on I thought. Suddenly, a bell rang, and all these characters made off to another room, I was about to follow and passed a table where there were three others. I recognised one of them once the fag smoke had finally gone, it was Pete Taylor, an old Labour stalwart. I said that I was there for the labour party meeting, and he said, he didn't think it was going to go on tonight as we are not Quorate as we need at least 25% of our membership. I mentioned all the names of the folk I'd just seen; Gary, Dave, Dougie, etc, only to be met with the response: "They are here for the Pigeon Club"

We never met that night, the next meeting was just about quorate, it was hell. One complaint was that "Pikeys" were over the airport. I tried to tell them that Travellers is a better way of describing them, but Pikeys was then changed to "Gippos". The problem was that the Travellers were on some land, and they

would be gone soon, but the mess they'd leave behind would be absolutely terrible.

I suggested talking to their representative and leaving skips there so that any rubbish could be put into the skips but was told that the "thieving buggers" would have the skips away and weigh them in for scrap. I said come on, they would need lorries with lifting equipment to do that, and looked to Pete as a voice of reason, he did speak up, thank you Pete, "No Paul, these Pikies, I mean Travelling Gippos, they're strong buggers, seen 'em mate, they got together, grabbed a corner each, and walked off with a skip, honest mate, weighed it in!" Such prejudice leading to these urban myths being widespread around this area.

Purely by coincidence the family in the council house next door to us in Knowle West knew we wanted to move to a three-bedroom house, out of Knowle West. They were lovely neighbours but I wanted something a little less lively. The Neighbour's Aunt lived in Keynsham and wanted to move nearer to her niece, so we agreed to a house swap.

I had been badgering Bristol City Housing to move, but nothing happened, a boy and a girl of secondary age sharing a room made no difference, had exchanges arranged, but my then wife pulled out because she liked Knowle West, then out of the blue in a fog of depression, an offer like this comes up.

We saw their house, 3 bed, nice area, bags of potential to make it into a lovely comfortable home. My then wife hated it, ours was a 2-bed white Mexican villa built in a day, nice and comfortable but not without its social problems. Heroin was on our estate now, Thatcher was in full swing.

They agreed to come and view our house on a Friday night and I couldn't wait. I was getting nervous thinking they would

cancel because that week could not have gone worse in our neighbourhood, being s the height of the Hartcliffe Riots.

Two lads, one of whom I briefly knew, were darting around Hartcliffe on a stolen police motorcycle. One of the duo was well known for his escapades on both two and four wheels, anyway the police were trying to get hold of them, and couldn't. They could not get the two to stop so a pursuing police bike clipped the back wheel and sent the two flying, killing them both.

Hartcliffe turned into a riot zone with shops burnt out, police pelted with fire bombs, cars on fire, helicopters in the air and although Hartcliffe and Knowle West were arch enemies, there are lots of crossovers, and we came out in sympathy for them, and our youth set a few cars on fire in solidarity.

By this stage, I'd convinced myself that our hope for escape – the neighbour's Aunt – was never going to come as police road blocks were in place. Seven o'clock came and went, but at 9.20 there was a knock on the door with the Aunt apologising profusely for having to go the long way round. They loved our house, we moved in August, none of my friends believed it was a swap, they thought my short time with the labour party had opened doors.

After we moved to Keynsham, I was away from a lot of my peers and the pressure. I became a mature student, eventually gave up working in the motor trade, started volunteering for a charity steering kids away from crime. I then got a job working with young offenders, and then with vulnerable families who face eviction, live on benefits, have children who do not see what education has to offer them, and see very little point in voting because they think it's a waste of time and that all politicians are the same: corrupt and in it for themselves. I truly believe my own experience in this field allows me to make a tiny difference in their lives. I give a little bit of myself to them, let them into small

areas of my life and hopefully leave them with hope. I really get it when someone has no energy to get to the foodbank, has to prove how broke they are to get some supermarket vouchers from welfare support, is expected to believe that politics can change their lives. Usually they are so beaten down that the only thing that makes them feel better is picking on someone – in their opinion – lower down in the "food-chain". Therefore it's the drunks, addicts, and immigrants who become targets of their superiority. No coincidence that the Far Right also target both these groups, one group they try to recruit and the other they spread hate and lies about.

For the first time in my life we have a realistic chance of a Socialist Government, but the establishment will not give up that easily. With Jeremy Corbyn there is hope, but hope and fairness need to be taught in our schools without the media quoting that its "political correctness gone wrong" at every opportunity. We need our media to stop promoting hate and backing a right wing capitalist agenda. We need to swap just 10% of our TV commercials back to Public information films, and last but not least, we need to bring the most needy of children, those in care, those who suffer poverty and neglect, and those who habitually offend into big organisations, such as Local Authorities – Fire, NHS, and give them a Fast Track or even a Slow Track career progression opportunity. Mine was the latter, but I know every inch of policy they talk about and how rarely those words that somebody has been paid a small fortune to write, apply to the families that they think they are trying to help. Only by getting the very children they are trying to protect embedded within the framework of our vital services will we begin to see the changes needed. Good luck with that one as they say...

*Due to concerns with copyright we've omitted the rest of these poems. But look them up, they're great.

By TANYA HAWKES

'**Poverty is a personality defect.**'
Margaret Thatcher.

'**I will help you up, I've got power to spare.**'
Hopeless, Rebel Spell.

A working-class life.

I'm from a lower working-class background. How is this defined? Class definitions have changed over time, but when I was a child, class was loosely categorised as lower and upper working-class, lower and upper middle-class and of course the upper class and aristocracy. There was an underclass too, but it was unclear what this was called.

'Lower working-class' broadly meant you lived on a council estate or in precarious rented accommodation. Your parent(s) were probably classed as 'low skilled' if they were employed at all, and you went to a secondary modern or comprehensive school. You qualified for benefits in some way. You had a very high chance of slipping 'downwards' on the class, economic and social scale if any one thing went wrong in your life, like illness, job losses or arrests. There's a high chance you were on the radar of social

services, or you were 'at risk' in some way. This was my childhood. You might wonder what being 'lower working-class' actually looked like. An episode of Shameless, maybe? Del Boy Trotter and Birds of a Feather? Or I, Daniel Blake, where everyone is moral and worthy and kind.

Well, my version probably looked different to everyone else's version.

When I was very young, it was heated arguments about the 'class traitors' who bought their council houses under Thatcher's 'right to buy' scheme. It was my Dad, flicking the Vs at Norman Tebbit on the telly: 'That bastard.' It was a big Irish Catholic family, our aunties and cousins and grandparents all living in the same street and on the same estate. An estate of solid, white houses with flowering gardens and a playground in the centre where the local kids swung and climbed on the metal and concrete equipment, aged four onward. Parents vaguely watching from the surrounding windows.

It was my Dad limping on his damaged leg caused by an army injury. He left school at 15 and joined the army at maybe 19. After his discharge, he worked hard night shifts in Gloucester Iron Foundry, my Mum trying to keep us kids quiet so my Dad could catch a couple of hours sleep. We were a loud family I expect: three kids, the eldest of whom had a severe learning disability and who happily and regularly banged walls and screamed.

As time went by, lower working-class was midnight rows from stressed and tired parents. It was my Mum, dealing with the grind and isolation that having a disabled child brings. My Mum was pregnant with my older sister at seventeen and not allowed an abortion (I think they were illegal then) and she struggled alone, until she met my Dad. My sister was severely brain damaged from meningitis she contracted when just a year old.

Lower working-class, was a car battery on constant charge on the kitchen worktop, next to the kettle, because my Dad was always trying to get the old Vauxhall Victor to work. Later it was no car and an annual hired car to take us to a caravan in Wales every summer. (Recently I found out that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation paid for our annual caravan holiday because of my sister's disability. Thank you Quakers!)

At the worst of times, being lower working-class was jagged broken plates and glass scattered over the kitchen floor, my Mum sat in the middle of it bleeding and my Dad carrying us next door to my grandparents. It was being sent away for a while to relatives while my Mum 'got better' but no-one said from what. Later it was my Mum being sent away to 'get better' but still no one said from what. We went to visit her in a long, white dormitory. She was grey and thin, but held us lovingly.

Lower working-class was other, happy things too. Coach rides to London to the Natural History Museum. It was piano lessons and violin lessons and being a 'Young Ornithologist.' It was my Mum playing Tchaikovsky and Bach in between the Rolling Stones and telling us all about artists and composers. Because lower class doesn't mean uneducated, though it might mean lack of qualifications. It was my telling me that I was really bright because I passed my 11 plus and that if I studied hard I might 'get to Oxford'. Because Oxford and Cambridge are the mythical places that people go to, with their spires and gowns, and the main point of reference for people who don't know much about higher education systems.

It was my Dad's friends who travelled all the way from Chile and we sang *The Internationale*. People talked in Spanish and French, and called each other 'Comrade.' It was visiting my Dad's old friend Bill, in his trailer, who talked about his time in the Spanish civil war. Because working-class can be internationalist. It was

Marie, our French friend who took me to London on the coach and showed me Karl Marx's grave and the Portrait Gallery, waving her hands at Renoir's paintings of 'lazy, bourgeois women'. Politics that I was bored and embarrassed by, but would come back to later. They were happy days. Sometimes tough, but we were loved, and unconditional love is no small thing to build a life on.

Later, lower working-class was my Dad's Iron foundry closing down. Loud union meetings and big, kind men. Collecting solidarity money for the striking miners because my uncles on my Mum's Welsh side of the family were also having their communities crushed. Redundancy for my Dad happened and we experienced a short burst of feeling rich when my Mum and Dad bought a washing machine and tumble dryer with the payout. Swiftly followed by free school meals and an often empty fridge.

Then it was low paid care work for my Dad and severe tiredness. It was my Dad's stroke at age forty-two, which he only just survived. It was my Mum's debilitating depression, which eventually killed her. It was the slow discovery that unconditional love and support is severely tested by poverty.

It was a house full of stray cats, one with it's eye shot out by an air gun. It was big Alsatians barking on tiny balconies in the flats opposite our council house. It was my Mum taking Ativans and Diazepams washed down with barley wine. It was my Dad unable to work from illness and then leaving home to live in a bedsit. It was me visiting him at the bedsit with the shared hallway bathroom and the 'friend' upstairs who'd let me into his room when my Dad was out to make me toast and cuddle me on his bed. Porn magazines splayed on the floor, he'd ask me details about my boyfriends. Grooming me? Or just kind? Maybe both, such are the contradictions.

It was my older sister going into a care home. It was the police calling round our house for this and for that. It was my heart sinking at the sight of my Mum's boyfriend's work van parked outside our house. It was his friends that came round, giving me beers and putting their adult hands all over my fourteen year old body, my Mum unaware. It was stealing my Mum's anti-depressants and tranquilizers and skipping school to block out what was happening. It was sniffing glue with my friend and listening to Conflict and UB40 records. It was ending up in a cold room in an unknown flat while two older boys (and a grown man) sexually assaulted me, bare mattress and graffiti on the walls. Except I didn't call it assault because I didn't have the language and I didn't tell anyone. By this point predatory male behaviour was just normal to me.

Lower working-class was kind teachers at my comprehensive school reaching out, encouraging me to come to school, ignoring my slumped, sleepy head on the desk at the back of the class. They let me find my way through it all without judgement, helping me to get through my O levels so I could stay and do A levels. I would thank them with all my heart if I could find them.

It was moving in with my Dad into his one bedroom flat. It was my Dad getting slowly better from his stroke and trying to work some night shifts as a security guard and supplying me with all the encouragement he could for someone still recovering from a major stroke.

It was older boyfriends, like the skinhead who was on a curfew and had to be home by 10pm every night. I went to my first football match with him – Coventry versus Arsenal – where I was threatened with sexual assault by Coventry fans and our black friend was called a 'dirty monkey' by racists who threw coins at us through the fence. I was wary of football crowds for a long time. But the next time I saw football crowds was years later

at anti-fascist action demos. I met Southampton football fans fighting fascism, and saw another side to football. I infiltrated a group of young BNP organisers to find out where their meetings were, terrified, I got involved more deeply within the anti-fascist movement, discovering dimensions of it that were new but familiar. The roots in Irish politics, the Rangers – Celtic divide and the 'No Surrender' fascists of the Unionist movements. It wasn't just about anti-black and brown racism, the NF and BNP were riddled anti-working-class politics. I studied History, specialising in resistance to fascism in Europe in the 1930s. This is a technique that has stayed with me all my life: I study the things I'm frightened of to try and understand them – fascism, climate change, mental health issues.

It was leaving my Dad's in the middle of my A levels and linking up with a network of punk friends. It was living cheaply and sharing giros with a house full of punks and hippies. 'Skipping' our food out of the supermarket bins, making big vegan meals and talking feminism, animal rights and politics into the night. It was finding this new world of DIY punk rock gigs, hunt sabbing, housing co-ops and poll tax demos and at last I felt like I'd found my people. I felt safe and happy in my new world of Thatcher's broken misfits, with their passion for politics and loud music.

Why is any of this important now?

My upbringing, my time working with people on the sharp end of health and social care cuts, followed by witnessing a much wealthier world of upper middle-class lives and even a few very rich people, has taught me some things.

I know what it's like to see suffering and death, directly related to poverty. I also know what it's like to sip a glass of expensive wine at a fundraising event hosted by some of the wealthiest people in the country. I've run my finger along the polished grand piano

of a billionaire and I've held the hand of my mother as she had to justify herself exhaustedly to the benefits office.

I firmly believe that society as a whole (but particularly the political, academic and NGO-think tank communities) should be learning from and following the lives and experiences of poor working-class people. And these experiences should be central to how we try to improve society. Why? Because people in this group survive through collective organising, informal shared economies and human connection. And these are the things that society needs right now, to heal, in so many ways. This is in no way to glamorise poverty. It's exhausting and stressful and humiliating, and ruins lives. But the collective organising by poor people, that is required to constantly push back against the conditions that make it stressful, could be the basis for the model of how we organise society as a whole.

I notice this particularly as I'm working on climate change. Mostly I'm surrounded by fairly middle-class, academic and affluent colleagues. So when they discuss solutions to climate change, those solutions are often based on reduction: Individual reduction of carbon footprints, of consumer goods, of flying and driving. When I talk to poorer people about climate change, there is rarely anything to 'give up,' or 'reduce' in their own lives – poor people aren't frequently flying, or driving two cars, or wasting lots of food – so their solutions are more useful. If you're poor, the solutions to climate change are either out of your control (the landlord won't insulate your house) or they are about 'adding' to your life (eg the local authority should build houses with PVs on the roof, or provide space for community gardens). The solutions become about how society should be reorganised. to add to, build on, and improve lives.

Similarly, when I worked in the mental health services, the service users, who were largely from poor and working-class

backgrounds, could clearly see that mental health would collectively improve with better housing, working conditions, pay, and well funded social care budgets, plus better access to informed choice of medical intervention.

The point here is community. working-class and poor people survive by collective action and community. The higher the social class the more individualised life becomes, in my experience (until you get to the super rich, with it's own international borderless, rule-less community, but that's a whole other article!).

A big problem in society is that poor people don't know what it's like to have money or security, and wealthier people really don't understand how an absent financial safety net shapes you.

I went to King Alfred's College to do my degree in History and Drama, and that's when it first dawned on me that lots of other people were very well off. However, I was a student of the 90s, grants still existed and there were a lot of other students whose parents were quite poor. A lecturer once asked our year how many of us had parents who hadn't been to university. It was nearly 50%. A lot of us had scraped in on quite low A level grades, but here we all were learning and debating and building that certain level of confidence that comes with an education.

I think we were self-segregated, because I rarely brushed shoulders with students who were well off, so wealth was still pretty abstract to me.

After graduating I worked for ten years in the mental health services, which doesn't tend to attract the wealthy or the middle class, and the service users were usually from working-class and poor backgrounds. It meant I barely considered class as an issue, apart from vague political notions of class politics. There were few personal class comparisons to make.

‘We need to get better at talking to working-class people’

Once I moved into the environmental NGO world, class became more apparent and conversations about class increased. Mostly, people don't recognise me as ‘lower working-class.’ I don’t have a strong regional accent. My west country accent has all but disappeared, (unless I’m a bit drunk). I have a degree and I work in an office, so I’ve been privy to some interesting remarks that I think people wouldn’t have said in front of me, if they knew my background.

One conversation that happens frequently in the environmental movement goes: ‘We need to get better at talking to working-class people about the environment.’ I don’t want to sneer – I get it. I get the desire for inclusivity and it comes from a good place. When I’ve pointed out to people that this is me. I’m that person, and I have a wide circle of family and old friends that are working-class and I talk to them about the environment all the time. They get confused and a bit embarrassed, because they don’t mean me.

Being people who don’t normally hang out with working-class people, they aren’t sure how to recognise one and the defensiveness creeps in, presumably, because they realise they hold a stereotyped version of who a working-class person is. I’m guessing they have images of loud men, white vans, tabloids, and probably northern/cockney accents. One person, when I pressed them on what they meant by working-class they ended up saying ‘it’s about attitude.’ Presumably then, Prince Harry can also be working-class, as long as he does his best cockney accent and cracks a few sexist jokes, or something. Such are the stereotypes. I find these stereotypes bemusing, particularly as my working-class mother was a gentle, classical music loving, amateur poet. She would have been overlooked in people’s search for the perfect, authentic working-class person.

What actually is class in Britain?

I guess Marx would say we are all divided into two classes. The owning class and the working class, and something about the petit-bourgeoisie. Our class position is tied to our relationship to the means of production, and whether or not we have control over it.

The National Readership Survey social grades – established 50 years ago – is the commonly used class classification system. You might recognise them as the A B C1 C2 D E classifications. It was generally a tool enabling market research surveys to classify people. Established when there was still a large manufacturing base in Britain, it's pretty out of date in terms of representing demographic changes, as its focus is predominantly on occupation and education.

More recently a BBC survey redefined class in terms of wider criteria including economic capital – income, savings, house value – and social capital – the number and status of people someone knows, revealing more classifications including a new 'precariat.'

There are also many complex intersectional layers of oppression that make poverty more likely, such as racism, sexism, and ableism which create multiple pressures in people's lives. There is a wealth of useful literature on these subjects at our fingertips, especially now that social media and writing platforms such as Medium have helped, in some ways, to provide a space for marginalised people to talk about their experiences.

State intervention is a mixed bag.

Poverty isn't inevitable for working-class people – it's designed. The people who saved me were teachers. Teachers with enough time to spare. The institutions that saved my Dad were local

authority housing trusts. My Mum, before her untimely suicide, survived on a benefits systems that was almost enough to live on. My older sister, severely learning disabled, relies on the state for housing and care. When we were children, free school meals kept us warm and fed and later when I had the chance to go to university, a grant meant that I wasn't crippled with debt.

The state can be violence. The violence of Home Office deportations, or the murder contained in the targets of the Department for Work and Pensions. But it can also be the Good Friday Agreement, where boring policy creates a mundane peace and stability for a traumatised people. Or it can be the Wales Future Generations Act, an attempt to protect people who don't exist yet – people with no power over what happens right now in society.

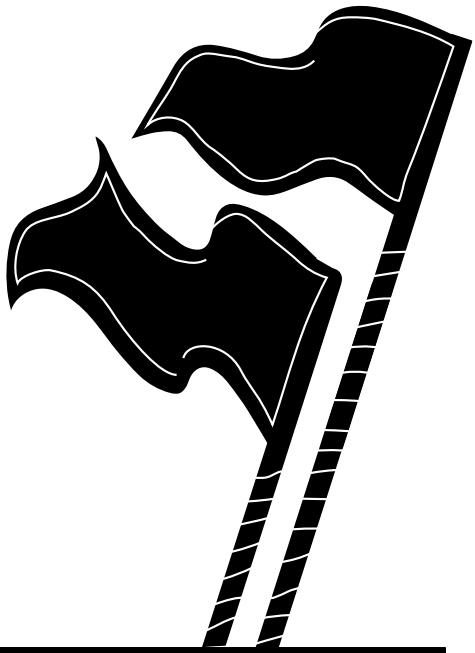
The state, in theory, can be representative of people through deliberative, democratic process. It can be a tool to protect people, or a weapon to patrol the gates of inequality.

Get rich or try sharing.

My early years showed me clearly that being working-class, being materially poor, isn't necessarily a problem as long as you have a safety net, with decent housing, a benefit system and a well funded education and health system. My sister and I scraped through life, with the aid of teachers who weren't too stressed to notice us, with free meals and because my parents had sick pay and housing benefit.

I can map onto my childhood the timeline of risk, and it was when the safety net was unravelled that our lives became precarious. This was at the beginning of the neoliberal project designed to undo the welfare state, council housing, universal education and health funding. It must be so much worse, two decades later. I

look back at my teenage years and early twenties – the good and the bad – and realise that collective political organising was what saved me and many others like me. The housing co-ops and workers co-ops, the gigs, the protests, raves, the people's kitchens, the squats, the spaces to come together and swap ideas and offer support: Models for a way of organising that leaves no-one behind as we try to rebuild a new system that supports everyone. Or as my favourite T-shirt says: 'get rich or try sharing.'



The Internationale

Eugène Pottier - Paris, June 1871

Arise ye workers from your slumbers
Arise ye prisoners of want
For reason in revolt now thunders
And at last ends the age of cant.
Away with all your superstitions
Servile masses arise, arise
We'll change henceforth the old tradition
And spurn the dust to win the prize.

So comrades, come rally
And the last fight let us face
The Internationale unites the human race.

No more deluded by reaction
On tyrants only we'll make war
The soldiers too will take strike action
They'll break ranks and fight no more
And if those cannibals keep trying
To sacrifice us to their pride
They soon shall hear the bullets flying
We'll shoot the generals on our own side.

So comrades, come rally
And the last fight let us face
The Internationale unites the human race.

No saviour from on high delivers
No faith have we in prince or peer
Our own right hand the chains must shiver
Chains of hatred, greed and fear
E'er the thieves will out with their booty
And give to all a happier lot.
Each at the forge must do their duty
And we'll strike while the iron is hot.

So comrades, come rally
And the last fight let us face
The Internationale unites the human race.

We thought it'd be fun to put the old commy song in here.

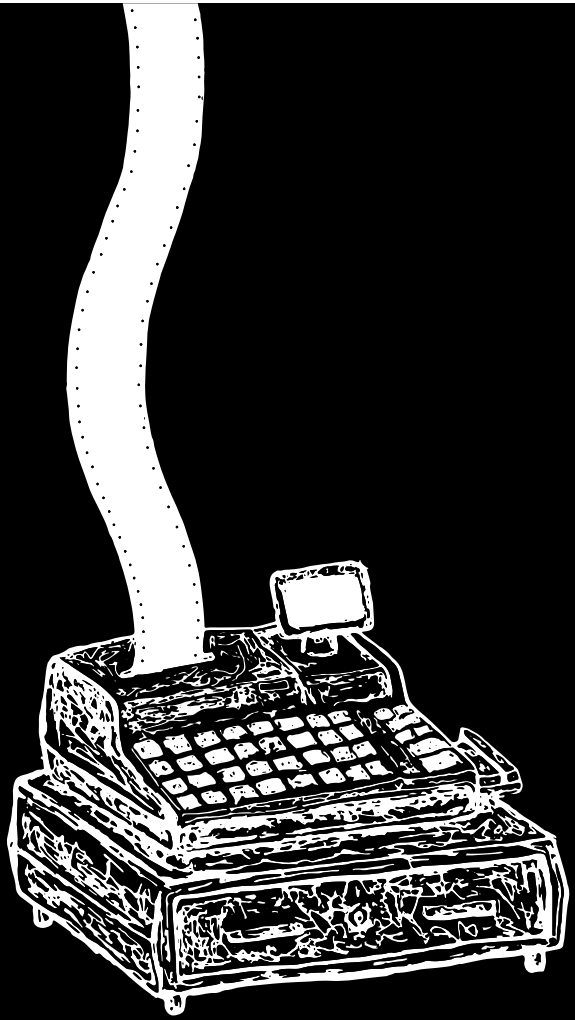
What else are spare pages for?

Ching Ching Life

Amy Kathleen

I went
Thru
'uni' on my generation's 'conveyer belt',
as is said,
ching! and the till –
I'm bought and owned
Always felt it was wrong
But
high grades
did it anyway
and now I'm done
I still don't fit.
Even with a first from the top dogs' places
I'm still not fitting

and nor do I want to
but things get precarious
and how to sustain?
now I'm negotiating the leash
negotiating confused notions of freedom
and responsibility
rejecting and working with it
an even possible balance?
it's hard out there – they did warn u that
but from the films and the
propaganda
they tried to make you believe
'follow your dreams'
...until when?
until they're no longer followable...
were they ever?



it's a soul laceration

you can't get wise quick enough
and even if you could
things'd still be
fucking shit m8.

We might make change,
But there's still gonna be fuck loads of waiting,
For some more than others, eh.

From Class Consciousness to International Solidarity via Greasy Spoons & Grayson Perry

Becky Buchan

On my kitchen wall there is a postcard from Grayson Perry's tapestry series on class. It shows the kitchen I lust after – sunny windows on all sides look onto a solid wooden table, an Aga, a Belfast sink, a good coffee pot, the Sunday papers, tasteful Moroccan tiles. But I don't keep it there as an aspiration. It is there to remind me to not become too middle-class. To not get distracted by comfortable consumerism from the bitter class war that politicians like to pretend isn't still raging.

Perversely, it is drummed into us to value our oppressors and aspire towards an upward class mobility. I have class traitor fear that drives me to declare my credentials. On my Mum's side, my Nanny, who was born in Battersea, escaped to the suburbs to vote for the Thatcher government that legislated against her own husband's union, leading him to lose his job at the print in Fleet Street. She spent my lifetime trying to correct my pronunciation

of 'waTer'. One day she showed me my family tree and I was hyped to see a great-great-great grandmother lived in Chelsea. That was until I saw occupation: 'cat meat seller'.

My Dad is a true cockney. He was born the third of eight kids in a house beside the Royal Mint in Stepney, to a wandering Irish tramp father and three times married powerhouse single mama. My early years were spent within my happy, close, and loving nuclear family.

Lucky that it was happy 'cause when we moved out of our council house, we moved into a turquoise ex-library van that measured 5m x 2m. Before I was born (oldest of five) my parents had lived in squats in Brixton and they returned to the underclass of the New Age Traveller movement. In the early 90's it was acceptable to put signs in the windows of shops that said 'No Travellers'. Thatcher's unemployed became a nomadic danger to society. They were living in large unruly groups, having a second summer of love, and developing class consciousness through practising anarchy.

At the 6 different primary schools I went to, from Plymouth to the highlands, I was the bullied kid who smelled of wood smoke and came to school photo day in a purple dress with suns and moons on it. When Stonehenge was on the TV I felt exotic and proud, explaining circus skills workshops at festivals to my PE class. When I grew up I embraced these privileges of street cred from playing on the dancefloors of the legendary early raves. Of course, it is a story of marginalisation and eventual full blown repression as the Criminal Justice Act outlawed our way of life and broke our ability to live together on site. Yet I recognise how much it empowered my sense of freedom and potential for revolution.

It was my first taste of the juicy cherry that is learning how to be

communal. The stone in the middle is that I need to make peace with the flipside of being treated as an outsider. I still experience that alienation that makes people look down on each other. I guess you could call me a second generation 'benefits queen'. Even my friends who claim to be anarchists resent that I am not out slaving for a wage. I do preach to them "don't be a hero", as my Dad preached to me, but there is a culture of people cultivating pride in keeping their heads down and killing their bodies making a profit for the big man.

It's harder with the parents at my daughter's private forest school (I pay through the nose for it, to hell with submitting my pride and joy to the two-tier education system in the UK that is set up to create workers and bosses!). At the school gates they're all chatting about how hard it is to find a builder who works hard, or to find a bigger house with more greenery for less money. When I pitch in, that in our rapidly gentrifying Hackney we've moved 5 times in my daughters 6 years, at the mercy of slum landlords, on'e woman said to me, "but it's ok for you and your daughter, she's used to it." My daughter feels so destabilised by private tenancies, she is continually planning what she is going to take to our next house.

But the worst was at the market, where one bloke having got thrown out the butchers in a hail of abuse checks out my trendy clothes and makes a whole host of assumptions. "Fuck you, it's alright for you, Daddy is a millionaire, buy you a house, Oxford, Cambridge, Oxford, Cambridge, OXFORD – CAMBRIDGE." My daughters asleep in the buggy, I'm mortified, uncharacteristically silent. I want to tell him that I would be in a fucking council house if there were any but… I think I had some white guilt going down. My Dad comes out the fabric shop, susses it out in about 5 seconds and is yelling at him as he disappears up the road "I am her Dad and I'm pretty fucking poor actually!" It's good to see that gentrification isn't going down quietly. I do like having

a health food shop nearby, but damned if I'm gonna dob in the crack dealers on the corner to the pigs looking for info.

There is a whole load of privilege that comes with having time, money, education to be an activist. I did my Anthropology of Travel, Tourism and Pilgrimage MA thesis on 'holidarity' trips to Exarcheia, Athens. Since the wall in Turkey was built, the media has hyped how many of the first loads of climate refugees have been coming across the Mediterranean Sea in boats, labelling them economic or war displaced migrants. With the retraction of the Greek State in economic crisis, Anarchists have organised to provide food and shelter. People from the US and Europe have also come to work in solidarity with the anarchists and refugees there and this is derogatorily called 'holidarity.'.

It is an uncomfortable truth that a lot of the people who go have a patronising attitude, spending more time and money on drinking than they do on projects with these grotesquely marginalised communities. If it is approached with humility and sensitivity to privilege, there are instances where it can move beyond volunteer tourism to justice tourism.

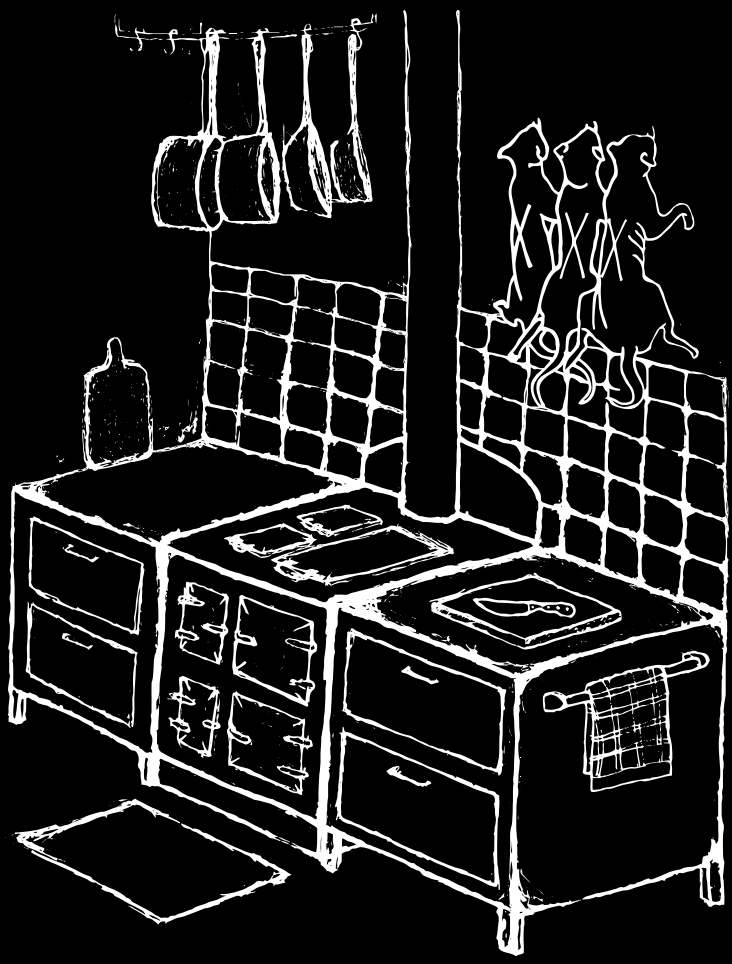
Volunteer tourism is your basic NGO development model, with funders, goals and volunteers going from rich countries to poor countries to 'help'. Think pictures on facebook of smiling youth posing with black babies in orphanages, putting them down again and going smugly home. Justice tourism tries to create economic self-determination with local people, positive cultural exchange through one-on-one interaction, environmental protection and political awareness. I found in Athens that through reflexive discussion and time, people are radicalised politically, but solidarity is the negotiation of friction and there's a lot of that But I still felt like they were more my people than XR, who do brilliant actions but trust the police and call on the state to act for the planet, as if they ever have before. Can't trust them, they are

in place to protect the elite, not the normal working class.

The experience of poverty worldwide shares some commonality. On my recent DIY activist trip to Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau with Black Star Caravan, I bonded with the village women doing my washing by hand, sharing stories of me and my Mum washing our clothes in the river. Still, there is this myth that people buy into that poor people don't work hard enough to change their lives. This ignores the global, social, economic, and political power structures that make up the structural violence that keeps people down. Funnily enough (in a sarcastic UK British, not funny at all way), this also feeds into my daily family life in the form of my daughter's papa's Mum.

A Nigel Farage voter who came to this country as a refugee from Soviet Chernobyl, she is a firm neo-liberal. At least it reminds me that fascists are human beings too, even as I struggle to debate with her about everything from the climate to Palestine. On a recent trip to Kiev, I bought a T-shirt with a Cossack on and Cyrillic writing in Russian that she translated as "slaves don't go to heaven". Oops. It's not my game to blame victims for their oppression. I've come to realise that the auto-immune diseases (like the genetic chronic condition psoriasis that I have) are handed down through generations of stress through poverty that trigger my genes to react.

Wouldn't it be better if everyone's work was something they really enjoyed, like play? What if we shared the shitty basic survival jobs and were all fulfilled creatively and spiritually by our vocations? This is what I am trying to reach with writing. I'm a shit stirrer with compassion, trying to use my privileges to empower myself and everyone else with those fundamental revolutionary bases of autonomy and solidarity.



A Class Apart

Joey Cotton

What is social class?

Although we may think we are familiar with the topic of social class, especially the traditionally recognised labels of working, middle and upper classes, recent analyses of class present a more complex picture. As society has developed power structures have evolved. The Great British Class Survey in 2013, argued that there now exist 7 distinct class groups in Britain, with varying levels of economic, social and cultural influence. While specific definitions and distinctions may be debated, the existence of class division and its impacts are very real.

In recent years, there have been real and tangible improvements to laws that protect people from discrimination and promote equality. In the UK, laws are in place to protect people from discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, race, religion, disability, age and gender identity. However, there is no similar legal framework for protecting discrimination on the grounds of social class.

But don't we live in a 'classless society' these days?

In the UK, the richest 10% of households own 45% of the nation's total wealth. In just five years, between 2003 and 2008, the top 1% of the population saw their income increase by 50%, whereas income for the bottom 90% of earners remained flat. A 2014 study from the Institute for Social and Economic Research found that through benefit and tax changes since 2010, the poorest income groups lost the biggest share of their incomes on average, whereas the top half of incomes gained from direct tax cuts. This economic disparity can be seen politically too; 32% of MPs attended a private, fee paying school, only 7% of the UK population have. Vast levels of economic inequality and the disproportionate impacts of political decision making show that class divisions within society persist, and are increasing.

What do class privilege and class oppression look like?

Social class results in a society in which we value the role and contributions of people from higher social classes more than those from lower ones. These class differences stem from our political, economic and social system which both rely on and enforce structures of social class.

The oppression by the haves over the have-nots has gone on for a very long time and the systemic structures that continue this oppression today are very much alive and well. As with other forms of oppression, class oppression can often go unrecognised, especially by those in the dominant group who enjoy unearned privileges associated with their social position.

Here are just a few things that help some people

1. *Well placed family networks and contacts that offer otherwise unavailable opportunities.*
2. *Being able to afford to take holidays*
3. *Educated parents to help with homework throughout school years.*
4. *Access to legal support and justice.*
5. *Freedom to focus on studies without having to work to self-fund in higher education.*
6. *Cultural influencing, via the arts, literature, media.*
7. *Being raised with middle-class manners making it easier to move in influential circles.*
8. *Accss to food.*

In contrast people from lower classes are expected to go without

thrive, unlike people from lower social classes...

9. *Being able to afford to take holidays*

10. *The financial security to take on significant levels of debt to undertake higher education.*

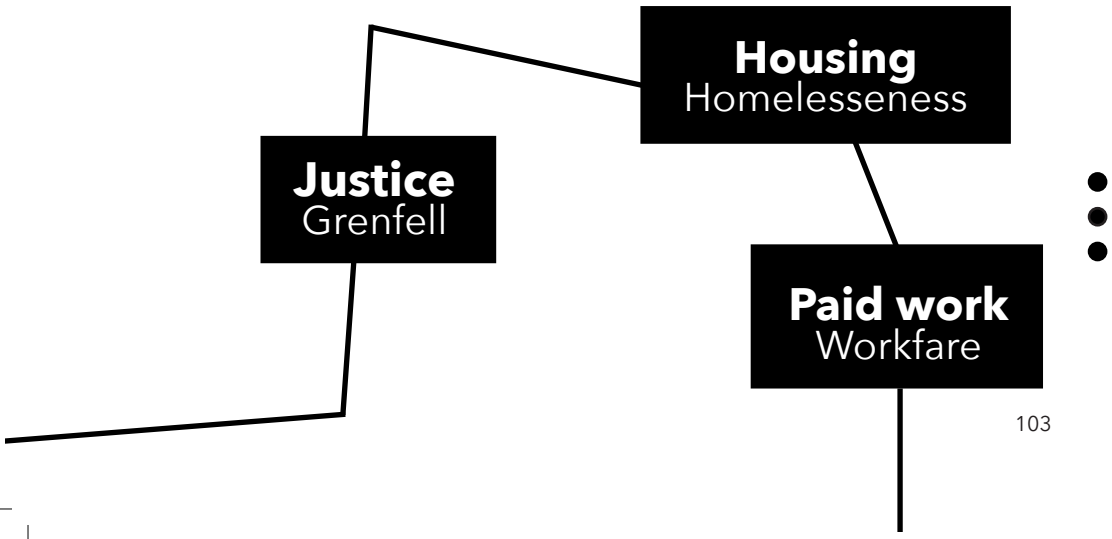
11. *Secure housing and shelter.*

12. *Being able to afford good quality food, clothes and accessories*

13. *Education at an elite, fee-paying school.*

14. *An upbringing coached in the idea that the world is your oyster, that you can achieve anything you desire or become whoever you want to be.*

15. *Access to inherited family wealth.*



Class privilege hugely influences a person's financial security, life opportunities, quality of life and access to resources needed in order to thrive. It provides a safety net, a backup plan and an expanded set of life options all rolled into one. Conversely, people without this safety net will experience their lack of class privilege in very many different ways, such as having to rely on foodbanks to feed a family, uncertainty about being able to afford next month's rent, sanctions being placed on benefits or being forced into workfare positions in order to receive basic benefits, discrimination in job interviews because of a particular accent, or an inability to afford further education. Class privilege also mediates problems in life in many different ways, like having access to private health treatments or being able to afford to move to different areas if you are a victim of discrimination or hate crime where you live.

Opportunities like holidays can be completely inaccessible for someone who struggles month-to-month to meet basic housing and food needs. Whereas working-class men may find it more difficult to compete for jobs against a middle-class women lacking similar opportunities in life, single working-class mothers will also experience oppression on the basis of their class and gender.

Other forms of class oppression result in having less cultural capital, for example, if you do not know how specific words or names of people are pronounced, if you have a specific preference for restaurants or clothes or other material objects deemed to be lower quality. Similarly, having knowledge of specific genres of music, art, literature, or types of sport – unlike say

opera or theatre; arts which are more accessible to those with more wealth and so afforded more value by the dominant classes - also count against people from lower/working-class backgrounds. in specific circumstances. Oppression can also result in experiencing demeaning attitudes from local, state and corporate officials, for example when applying for benefits or seeking a loan. However, these hostile attitudes exist in social life too. Unemployed people will often experience public hostility most, for example being called "benefit scum" or something similar.

Class oppression – where does it come from and who wins?

Whether you grew up in the home of a manager, small or large business owner, barrister, teacher, nurse or precarious worker, will help shape – for better and for worse – your culture, and familiarity with specific kinds of workplaces, communities and societies. Those who do "empowering work" in the workplace are more likely to have the confidence to make important decisions in their community and society.

The existence of a social structure based on class is not accidental. There are a range of ways, both subtle and overt that are used by government, by corporations and by our society to maintain a class based system

Class oppression is systematically reproduced by governments and corporations to oppress the have-nots through welfare reforms (universal credit) coupled with tax cuts for the wealthy. This era of austerity since the financial crash in 2008 has been used as a smoke screen for an ideological attack on the welfare state and

the poorest people in our society, the working class, being the direct recipients of this state oppression.

For example, the application of benefits sanctions for the infringement of Job Centre rules, withdraws the means of survival for some people, and have resulted in suicide, ill-health, affected mental well-being, increased debt levels and undermined housing security. This is the context of a 'gig-economy' and zero hour contracts – both of which promote precarious work and have led to huge increases in the number of working homeless people. With Tax Credits and Jobseekers currently being merged via the new 'punishment' based Universal Credit, oppression and poverty are set to increase, and all aided by a major redistribution of wealth away from the poor to the rich.

- Corporation tax, inheritance tax and the top rate of
- income tax have all been reduced under the current
- (Conservative) government benefiting the wealthy. Yet even more tax cuts are being advocated. Rising levels of inequality in the UK due to benefit sanctions, welfare cuts, inflation and wage stagnation are set to see a return to the levels of inequality in the UK last seen in the 1980s.

Does class have any relation to other oppressions?

Class is just one of many dimensions of society - with race, gender, disability, and sexuality for example - being as other equally important dimensions of social life, that intersect, overlap, and reproduce one another.

Class analysis must be combined with feminism, anti-racism, and anti-authoritarian analysis as it is important to ensure that our struggles fight for the liberation

of all. For example, feminism and class oppression intersect in the closure of domestic violence refuge centres nationally. Impoverished Black communities face disadvantage and alienation both as result of their class and their race, which intersect. Feminism and anti-racism can also highlight different types of class dynamics and relations. For instance, the traditional role of teachers or doctors as occupied by middle-class women, whilst nurses, teaching assistants and catering staff may be both working-class and people-of-colour, and so in each instance experience oppression and require solidarity accordingly.

Okay but what does this all have to do with my radical activist group?

Activist spaces and groups do not exist in a vacuum from the rest of society. We have all been born into a world that is unequal, unjust and based upon systems of power, privilege and oppression. As such, our activist spaces can easily replicate existing prejudices and systems of oppression. The way meetings are organised in the first place may determine how accessible they are to people from a variety of class backgrounds including the timing and length of meetings, how they are advertised and whether things like child care have been taken into consideration.

Internalised messages around class privilege often lead to feelings of unrecognised superiority, entitlement and deservedness that inform people's actions and behaviour – and consequently gatekeeping and exclusion. This is how class oppression can be experienced and replicated in our groups. It can mean that those with more class privilege are more

comfortable stepping into leadership roles, feel more comfortable articulating their views in a meeting and have increased educational opportunities to develop the language to do so. People with more class privilege are often conditioned into knowing that their voices are valued and deserve to be heard, and can be more likely to push for and obtain what they want out of a meeting or situation even to the detriment of others and irrespective of the needs of the group.

"The importance of understanding class differences in relation to group dynamics can be summed up like this: direct lived experience of poverty - and austerity - through class based oppression, is equally, if not more, important than any theoretical understanding of economic oppression. This means any ''burden of exchange'' falls upon privileged group members to ensure active listening to people experiencing economic oppression and so facilitating their genuine inclusion. This means taking care not to be easily offended by expressions of emotion that may sit outside of middle-class, or privileged sensibilities: it calls for an awareness of how experiential emotion can shape language, discussion and knowledge in the context of class based differences" Warren Clarke, Co-founder, Boycott Workfare

When entering into an arena of class privilege, or a space dominated by middle and upper class people and cultures, people from 'lower' classes are operating in an arena where the rules are different. They have to learn to play the game that many people of class privilege have been playing their whole lives. Someone from a lower class background may have an element of doubt when contributing in an arena of

class privilege, a group of predominantly middle-class activists for example. Automatically excluding people for not playing by the rules, maybe for swearing for example, replicates elitist power structures, and places 'the burden of exchange' on those without the class privilege in a pretty extreme way: by making them feel unwelcome in the group or overtly excluding them. This is in turn can be compounded by safe spaces; codified rules replace compassion and empathy. Surely radically driven change by activists ought to come from working with the other, rather than working within the comfort zone of the known?

If we choose to ignore the issue of class when addressing diversity within our groups we are replicating the very same structures of power that exist in society; people from privileged backgrounds, the 'haves', taking up the room to speak in our meetings, defining the acceptable culture in how we should relate to one another, setting the agenda and making the decisions, to the continued experiential exclusion and oppression of the 'have nots'.

What is radical about that?

WHICH SPACE? WHO'S SAFER?

IT IS 2019

Joe

It is 2019, my mother, aged 56, sits in a flat she never leaves, in a town we never chose to live in, having been moved there by the police to escape a violent ex. This ex was housed half a mile away from us after being released from prison for repeatedly assaulting my Mum and pulling a knife on the arresting officer. My Mum was released from a psych ward with him, despite the fact they both had a history of domestic violence. In this case, he, the abuser and she the victim. We had a panic button installed in our flat for a few months, my Mum drinking heavily, reliving the same trauma we went through when I was born and had to outrun my violent father some 7 years previous.

Back then we ended up in a women's refuge in South London. I was 2 years old and count our escape as my earliest memory, up front in a transit van with a Hells Angel called Chub who had turned on my father to help us get out. My father had done time for his part in a gangland shooting and was, by all accounts, a violent and cowardly man. He had come by the hospital after I was born and tried to take me but the midwives managed to change the name on my wristband to hide me amongst the other newborns.

My Mum and her brother had been born 13 months apart and, along with their older sister, had grown up in the army, travelling from place to place with my grandma and Granddad. My grandma was of Romani stock, selling heather from door to door with her grandmother when she was a kid and was a strong and stoic woman. My Granddad died of a heart attack aged 49 whilst working shifts at the local Nestle factory, plummeting the family into more poverty and grief. He had been an alcoholic gambler and left the family with not a penny to their name. All 3 kids suffered sexual abuse at the hands of more than one culprit. They ended up on a council estate on the greenbelt just south of Croydon. I lived on the same estate for a while, riding the neighbours Great Dane, pretending to have pierced my ear with a metal hoop clasped around my earlobe so I'd fit in with the local kids.

My uncle was, in hindsight, on the autistic spectrum. He had been a chronic yet functioning alcoholic since his teens, working as a groundsman at a local private school, setting alarm clocks to wake him for a bottle of wine every hour, stashing vodka in the hedges on his way to work and then finishing in the local pub for 15 pints of Guinness and a shot from every optic. He was a chronic self-harmer but luckily ended up going to rehab for a year in 1999 before completing an access course at college. He was offered a scholarship at Oxford University after a tutor at college recommended that he apply. The pride we felt when his success story made The Times newspaper. He'd turned it around in a big way and against the odds.

As soon as he got his degree he came straight to our aid. I was 13 at the time, suffering from the weight of responsibility of my mother's care, missing school to stay home to look after her, and generally misbehaving the way any child would, given the start I'd had in life. My uncle was my hero, introducing me to literature and music, and taking me to gigs on a regular basis. For 9 years

we got by a little better, a positive male role model in my life for the first time. My mother's health deteriorated rapidly both physically and mentally, but I was able to flee the nest without worrying she'd be alone.

I left home aged 18, travelling to Brighton to stay on a mate's floor. I'd recently been arrested for bottling a dealer at a party in Manchester. The local police had cautioned me because of my evident remorse, and, in hindsight, the colour of my skin. A lucky break. This was enough to push me to get out of the north for a while. I stayed in Brighton for a year, did a few months in Edinburgh with a girl I'd met before we broke up, and I jibbed off to London to squat with 200 others in a block of 94 flats near Limehouse (a part of my life best left for another piece of writing). I travelled a bit further after escaping London under much the same cloud that had made me leave the north, staying in a commune in the south of Spain, squatting in Basque country and generally drinking, stealing, and fighting my way around Europe via free trains, hitchhiking, and busking. I returned from one trip just after my 22nd birthday. A few weeks later my uncle was found dead on the sofa aged 47 by my mother, our whole world was torn apart.

In a cruel twist of fate, his death came at the same time as massive cuts were being delivered to our local mental health services. Not only had we lost our rock, but all professional support was withdrawn, including my mothers CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) whom she had been working with for over 10 years. I was 22 at the time and already 8 years into a life of petty crime, violence, undiagnosed mental health problems, and alcoholism. In the aftermath of this shock I tried to take my life 3 times but failed. I was repeatedly denied any form of psychiatric help. I drank and tried hard to balance caring for my mother and dealing with my own grief. I met my ex who had an 18-month-old daughter and moved in with her whilst my Mum was moved into a small

flat after deciding she couldn't stay in the house she'd found her brother dead in. There were times my Mum accused me of killing him, times when she seemed to be having an exorcism, cowering in the corner screaming for hours, not knowing who I was. It was fucking horrible for us both.

As I write this my Mum is most likely sleeping, forever coshed by a heady mixture of prescribed drugs that have the fleeting medical professionals on emergency hospital visits visibly shocked, unable to fathom why and how on earth she has been over-prescribed so much medication at such an alarming rate. She has been prescribed so much morphine her bowel has paralyzed, which means she often runs the risk of vomiting her own faeces, yet the NHS refuses to provide her colonic irrigation and she can't afford nor physically make it to private clinicians. This coupled with a constant stream of sedatives – including Valium – prescribed to her daily for over 15 years means she is disabled by the medication alone, any medical professional will tell you that this is a dangerous mix, not to mention the mass load of antipsychotics that keep her from feeling anything but absolute disorientation and confusion. At present she takes over 100 pills a week. My mother has been a victim of a failed system all her life. Enforced ECT aged 15 to treat her grieving for her father, a life of violence, domestic abuse, poverty, illness, and addiction, that I in turn inherited.

With her care package cut from 66 hours a week to just 0, we are in the shit. A no DSS policy means we cannot move to be closer to her nor can we move her to be closer to us. The family unit broken down, services cut, we are on our own fighting a battle that we know will only be over for us if by some miracle I make enough money to put her into private healthcare, or if we somehow meet a generously rich benefactor who cares enough to offer some financial support. With the Conservatives in power I hold little hope that the services and support we so desperately

need will return any time soon, much less that they will return with progressive treatments at the forefront of their initiatives instead of yet more medication.

Just like my mother and uncle before me, I am a recovering alcoholic diagnosed with a plethora of enduring mental health problems. My experience with my Mum has led me to eschew all medication in my battle, a tough call but one I am prepared to attempt in the name of avoiding a pharmaceutical addiction that I stand less chance of receiving support for than my alcohol and drug addictions. Just 3 weeks ago I was convinced that taking my own life was the only way out of this situation, I wrote my note but luckily found enough strength to share my feelings with my partner who pushed me to ring for help. My partner has been the only person to help us out. Juggling my ongoing problems with those of my mother; she is our lifeline and I worry for her own mental health and the effects such massive responsibilities will undoubtedly have on her.

I am lucky in that I am a highly creative individual. I was actively excluded from learning any instruments at school and have never been able to get on with the education system enough to make it through college or university, but I continue to make music and art as part of a loose collective of artists and have found moderate success in acting, writing, and documenting my experiences through creativity. Without these vessels of communication, I fear I would crumble under the weight of it all. I am engaged in alcohol services after experiencing seizures due to my dependant drinking and am currently 21 months sober. I also await further therapy on the NHS, but with waiting times of up to 2 years I have had to forge my own path of self help which includes, amongst other things, cold water immersion, art therapy, and basking in the comfort of nature and wildlife.

My mother is awaiting a place at an over 55's residential home.

I wish more than anything I could provide a few more years of something resembling independence for her, but I know deep down that the best thing for her is 24-hour support in a place where she gets to see more than just mine and my partner's faces. I continue to communicate our experiences with anyone who will listen and thank my lucky stars I was raised with love and books and am able to sit here and voice these things rather than join the mass of people suffering in silence at the hands of a system not fit for human purpose. People are dying on our streets, the social cleansing of the most vulnerable people in our society continues, and all to prop up the lifestyles of an inherently malevolent elite who continue to grow richer with blood on their hands. I thank my friends, my partner, her family and my mother and uncle and their mother before them. They all show me love and that, I am convinced, is what has kept me alive and out of prison to this day.

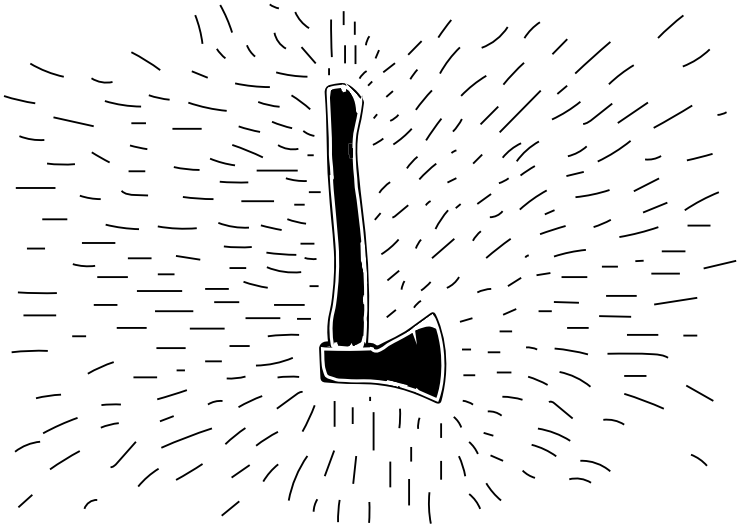
Epidemic

Katharine Eavan

Poverty, that slow sickness
That kills through creeping dread
Lack of hope and resignation
Without a glimmer of silver lining
Or glistening gold
Only coal black, tar
Sticking to everything it touches
Health, security, pride
Are all tainted by the disease
That we've always known how to cure
But won't.

Love, Sex & Patriarchy in the Abstract

Zoe Naylor



The reason I only ate a 3rd of the lemon goujons we skipped and that I cooked, was because you were a man and I was trained as a woman, that your needs are more important than mine. You didn't notice, and yet I was conscious you may need more food than me. You just fucked me after all. The reason, last night, I only took my sleeping bag and a blanket, and left you with the rest of the bedding, was because I thought it better that I was colder than you. I don't know why, and I woke up cold. The reason I haven't chopped wood for our two weeks together is because if I bother to make a fire or chop the wood, it is something I cannot be left to do alone, without your continuous advice. It's easier if you do it, as you know best after all. What's the point in me doing it, when you constantly tell me how to do it. The reason I have got up each morning and offered you coffee, is because I thought you would be nicer to me if I did, but I never made it right.

When we have spoke honestly and openly about our relationship and I have talked about the things that trigger me and its basis in the patriarchy, you have told me not to take the interpersonal into the abstract. But you are the patriarchy and I am the matriarchy. You told me, I see patriarchy in everything, even the women. I do, because the patriarchy is in everything, even me. It's in the food I make you, the wood I don't chop, and the warmth of the evening. It's that when I finally became confident at chopping the wood, within minutes you were at the door with your head torch watching, to see how I was doing with it. It's that I need practice, and I will never get to practice in peace as long as there is a man around. It is that a man feels it is their place to watch a woman chop wood because they are more experienced. It is that practice, being constantly judged axes my confidence. It is this, that makes me not bother at all and sit warm by the fire further heated by my resentment at my inability to just get on with it. It is that bullshit that keeps us warm all night.

It is your beautiful paternal influence that fills me with not being good enough or brave enough to do the things that you do. The need, to need you by my side when we rummage through bins, run down the battery on the car, or get pulled by the cops. The cops who look you directly in the eyes to ask if my documents are in order, when it's been made clear that I am the owner of the van. It is the reason I fucked you 10 times this week, when 4 out of 10 times, all I wanted was for you to cuddle me, but I didn't know how to ask. It is the reason I fuck you because I want to feel wanted, when all I want is to be held. Any touch is better than nowt, right?

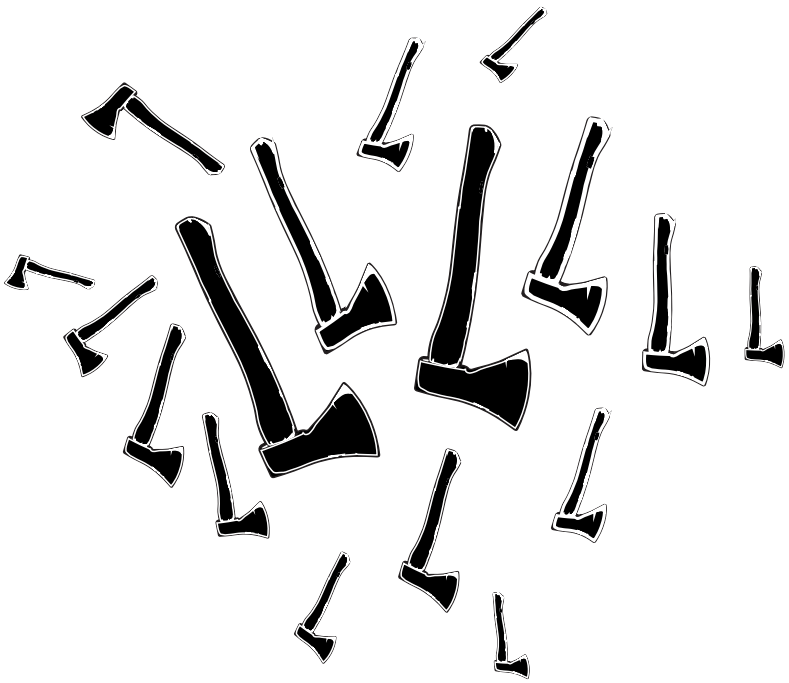
It's the reason you don't trust my autonomous decision making when I tell you of the choices I made, about the climbing over fences or riding down cliffs on my arse. You

don't think I'm capable of managing my own safety and that I should have an hour lecture on the dangers of nature in case I break an ankle. Trust me, try. I'm a woman, I know more than most where it is safe to take risks and where it isn't. I got this far without breaking an ankle. I just acquired wrinkles instead. It's the reason I don't want or need you forever but desperately want you to want me every moment I'm with you. It's the reason we argued about science and its validity for hours on end and whether or not the stories of an indigenous woman would be valid if it's not documented by historians in at least 7 books (most of which would probably be written by white males); Am I really even bothering to justify this shit? Is it because I'm fucking you and sometimes you make me feel good?

It's the reason you told me that you know how to process chaga like people have been doing it for thousands of years, despite me telling you it's wrong with my 15 years of practically working with herbs. It's the reason when I told you how whole herbs cannot be scientifically validated in modern science, you told me 'I was right'. Thank fuck for that. My 15 years of practice and education just got validated by someone whose work with herbs is chewing ginger every few days. Finally, I said something that you agreed with and didn't have to spend hours justifying either my autonomy, my knowledge, or my ability to conduct my life safely on my own.

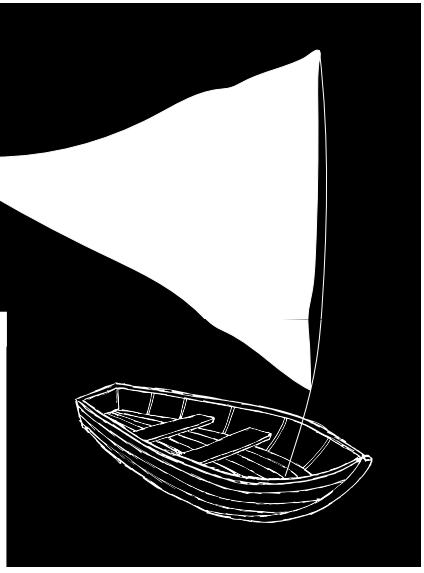
So when I tell you our interpersonal is the patriarchy. Don't tell me it's in the abstract. The person is the political. When you tell me your needs and capacity clearly and expect me to honor them but haven't taken a moment to check on mine. Don't tell me it's in the abstract. When you tell me, you're not a feminist because it's a woman's fight, don't then tell me you're an ally. You're a good fuck, a good laugh

and fuck me, a good political conversation. But only if you stop to listen enough, to hear me, I mean really hear me, well beyond what your patience and political knowledge allows. Then don't tell me my experience is in the abstract when I bring patriarchy into our interpersonal relationship. Your privilege is yours. My oppression is mine. Our gendered relationship is both of ours. But I've no chance of taking responsibility of my side of it, if I'm not allowed to talk about it. The paternal and the maternal, and whatever exists in between is my love and the god dam fucking patriarchy. So when I get angry at all the things I couldn't say, was dismissed or unable to voice, because it's easy for you and harder for me, and I wash the pots in silence and you chop the wood in noise. Don't fucking tell me I see the patriarchy in everything, when the patriarchy often talks more and even louder then you.



Why We Fight

Dave Tomory



I don't claim to speak for everyone. I'm not alone in the pain I feel, the words driving out of me, but there are many to whom they don't apply.

I'm part of the subculture. I grew up in a lower middle-class/ upper working-class family, self employed Dad and we all worked in the same business. I was home educated. First person who calls me middle-class can swivel - knowing how to use words doesn't mean I've never had to use my hands. I've used my hands all my life.

We fight because we live and die. We fight because they fuck us over. My Dad's business was destroyed when he was foolish enough to fight the council in court over illegal charging of tax. They broke up his 56ft wooden ship on the quayside over nine grand's worth of unpaid bills. They killed a dream because of money.

We fight because we always lose. I've seen two families grow and love and hope and fall apart over mental health and poverty and straight up trying to hold on too hard. Our communities sabotaged by a culture of individualism. Our children's lungs shrunken from living near main roads. Our kids' lives scarred from alcoholism and social services and domestic violence and a hundred other incurable diseases of exploitation. They tell us it's our fault.

We fight because the world is ending. Our worlds are always

ending. Capitalism has ended an infinite number of them, crashed them down - tiny worlds of villages, ways of life, histories - from the miners' strike to the enclosures. Our worlds are always ending and the prophets only profit from the truths of our lives. The conspiracy theorists and the snake oil salesmen and the marxists tell us they know the answer and all they know is how to take advantage.

Another ruling class.

I fight to make them hurt the way I do. I broke down in tears this morning listening to a song I heard as a kid. "If the grasses don't run dry and the newborn calfs, they don't die - another year from Mary will have flown." I've worked all these hours on a hundred plans and projects and all I have for it is memories and years. One day we'll sweep it all away. The strength of the people, helping eachother despite class, despite race or religion - one people holding hands, holding each other up to the task. That strength could do anything. That strength could build something that lasts.

I see it in your eyes.

Why we don't fight.

We don't fight because we love each other. Because the kids look good, don't they. Because all we ever wanted to do was fuck about in the sun. Because I'm just so tired today. Because they tell me I'm worthless. Because this house is alright and the housing benefit has it paid for. Because we fancy a drink. Because we want to talk more than we want to smash shit up. Because the myriad suffering of people like us all over the world is just too far away. Because we're doomed anyway and we just don't feel it. Because no-one loves us and we can't find it in us to pick up the hammer again. Because this plan might just work. Because we've lost too much. Because it's hopeless. Because we just need a break.

But we come back. We come back and we fight and we'll fight until we die and we raise kids who know how to fight too. Beat that, motherfucker.

They do, they will - until we win.

LUM
PEN.

How To Guide For Writing (With Us).

Here are 9 points you need to know:

1. We only accept writing from those who identify as working class or have experienced long term involuntary poverty and economic hardship.

2. We may accept writing of all length, but generally we look for anything between 2,000 and 4,000 words.

3. We accept all styles of writing – fiction, non-fiction and everything else.

4. For each issue we will suggest several themes and questions. If you want to write about something beyond these drop us an email as we might be planning a later issue that fits with it better.

5. If you've never written before or are lacking in confidence in your writing, get in touch. We can give support with your piece of writing, and devise different strategies with you to get your ideas out of your head onto the paper. For example one article for a future issue, will be a transcribed interview with a working class organiser.

6. Don't worry if you're not confident about spelling, grammar, sounding educated enough. What we're interested in is hearing your ideas based on your lived experiences.

7. Concerned about style? Don't be, we're happy to publish openly angry rants written in stattco rhythm or fictional narratives about killer avocados on toast and everything else inbetween. Whatever voice you feel comfortable using.

8. Please title your work, if you can't think of one we can help you find one.

9. Name yourself as you would like to see it printed, or state if you would like to remain anonymous.

Happy Writing!

Tips for worriers:

Don't know where to start? Start in the middle. Just try to get your ideas down on paper. It's all practice.

Redrafting is everything. If you don't like your first draft, that means you are ready to improve on your writing.

Get in Contact:

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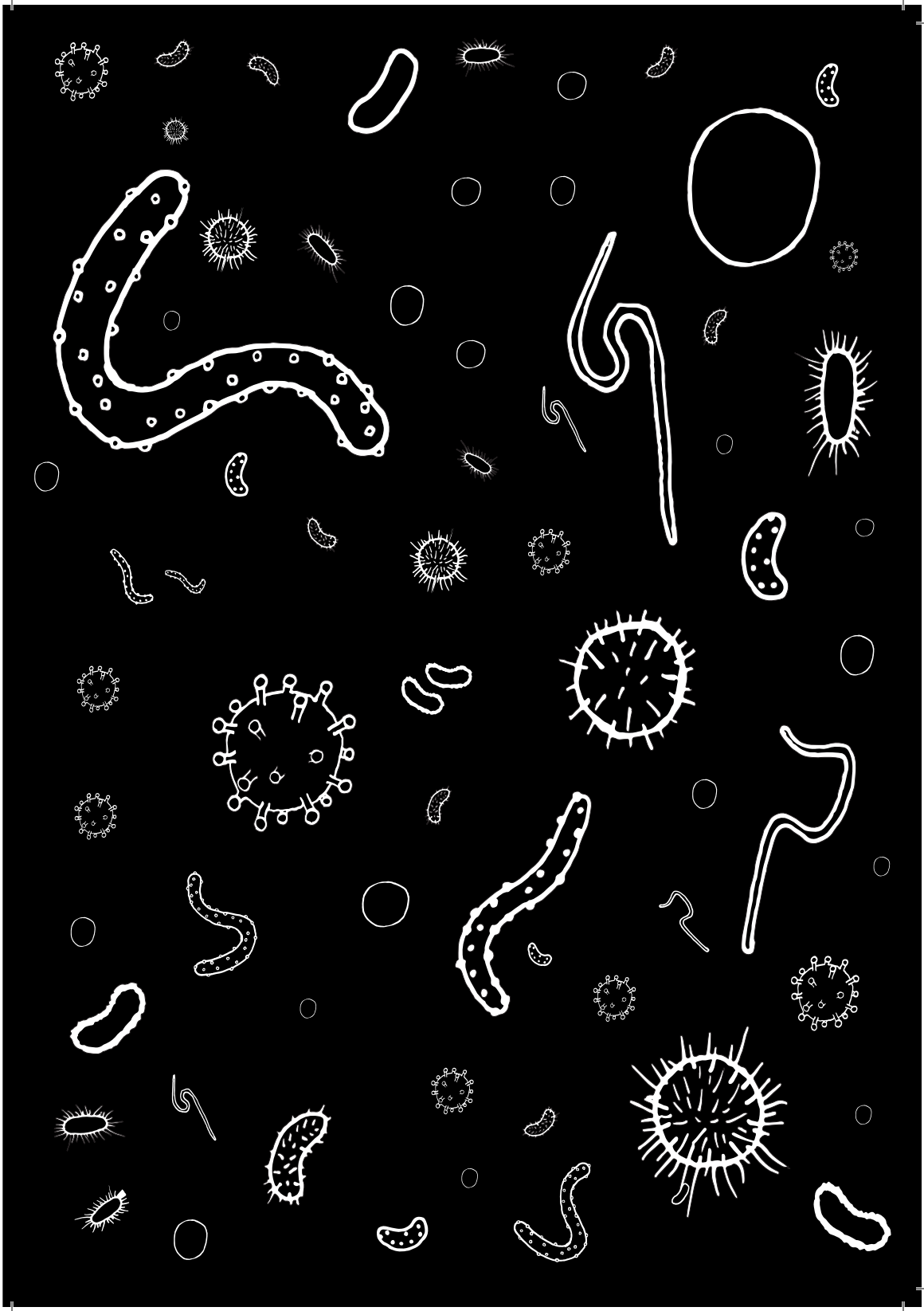

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